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# David Bowie 1947-2016





# RS772

"ALLTHENEWSTHAT FITS"

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David Bowie A tribute to the legend. By Mikal Gilmore
Leo's Crusade Leonardo DiCaprio is in his most riveting movie in years. But he really just wants to save the planet. By Stephen Rodrick58
The Sharp-Dressed Man When Leon Bridges hit Melbourne last month we tagged along for the day. By IAN LAIDLAW64
From Boys To Punks Does it matter if 5 Seconds Of Summer are an actual rock band? Only to them. By PATRICK DOYLE68
The Flight of Twenty One Pilots Why is the biggest new band of the past year so stressed out? By Andy Greene
El Chapo Speaks A secret visit with the most wanted man in the world.  By Sean Penn
ROCK & ROLL

### The Road Back

### **Q&A Rick Ross**

On his house arrest, loving *Star Wars* and Adele, and his secret for staying in shape......**20** 

### Welch/Rawlings

Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings plot a return to Australia......**26** 

### **Tributes**

Remembering Lemmy, Natalie Cole, Stevie Wright and Glenn Frey......28

### **DEPARTMENTS**

### **RANDOM NOTES**

### **RECORD REVIEWS**

#### Sia

Sia reclaims songs that Adele, Rihanna turned down.......95

### MOVIES

### Steve Jobs

Think you know what a great biopic is? Think different....*102* 

### **THE LAST PAGE**

### **Brendon Urie**

Panic! at the Disco frontman on chicken hearts ...... 106

**ON THE COVER** David Bowie in 1974, photographed by **Gijsbert Hanekroot/Redferns**.





### **CORRESPONDENCE**

LOVE LETTERS & ADVICE



### **Beacon of Hope**

IT MEANT SO MUCH TO ME to see Troye Sivan on the cover of your latest issue. The manner in which he's so open about his sexuality makes him a brilliant role model. That his music is so beautiful is the icing on the cake. In this age of questionable celebrity motives I'm so proud that one of our own is a beacon of hope for millions around the world. Keep up the good work.

> Jason Gray, Blair Athol, SA

### **Tribute Fail**

SHAME ON YOU. SCOTT WEIland was arguably one of the greatest vocalists to come out of the Nineties era. I'm shocked and appalled that a reputable music magazine would only give Scott a onepage tribute instead of the

cover and a multi-page spread. [RS 762] Instead you decided to put a pubescent Troye Sivan on the cover and dedicated not one but six pages to an 'artist' (questionable) who's more of a film actor and Youtube sensation rather than an actual musician. I expect a better tribute in next month's issue otherwise I'll be cancelling my subscription to your magazine.

Christopher Chandler Sydney, NSW

### **Heavy Praise**

WHAT A BLOODY LEGEND John Sankey is. Not only is he an Aussie doing well overseas (he plays drums in the Devil You Know), but when Soundwave was cancelled it was his idea to set up Legion Festival, proving he's doing this for the right reasons - the fans. Whether or not Legion actually happens is besides the point - John has given me reason

"I'm shocked and appalled that a reputable magazine would only give Scott Weiland a one-page tribute."

### **Princess Rave**

IT'S NOT LIKE CARRIE Fisher's life has been easy recently. Dealing with bipolar disorder, losing almost 20 kilograms for the new Star Wars film, not to mention the toll that her use of LSD (mentioned in RS 762) must have taken on her. It's uplifting to hear that she's such a happy woman, free from negativity. Her quirkiness and ability to brush off haters (such as the recent weight abuse she received over Twitter) shows us just how happy celebrities can be. I applaud her.

Thomas Devereux Moama, NSW

to believe in the local heavy scene more than ever before.

> Mark Jakobs via e-mail

### **Fantastic Falls**

CONGRATS TO THE CREW AT the Falls Festival for putting on such a killer festival at the Mount Duneed Estate. I thought for sure the Victorian leg would be cancelled with the bushfires, but somehow they managed to move it from Lorne with hardly any notice, keep everyone safe and put on a brilliant couple of days. Top work.

Taryn Tang, Bundoora, Vic

### WRITE TO US AND WIN



Every letter published in this issue will win a copy of the Cult's new album, Hidden City, valued at \$19.99. Write to us and tell us your thoughts on the magazine or life in general. But please, keep it brief!

letters@rollingstoneaus.com

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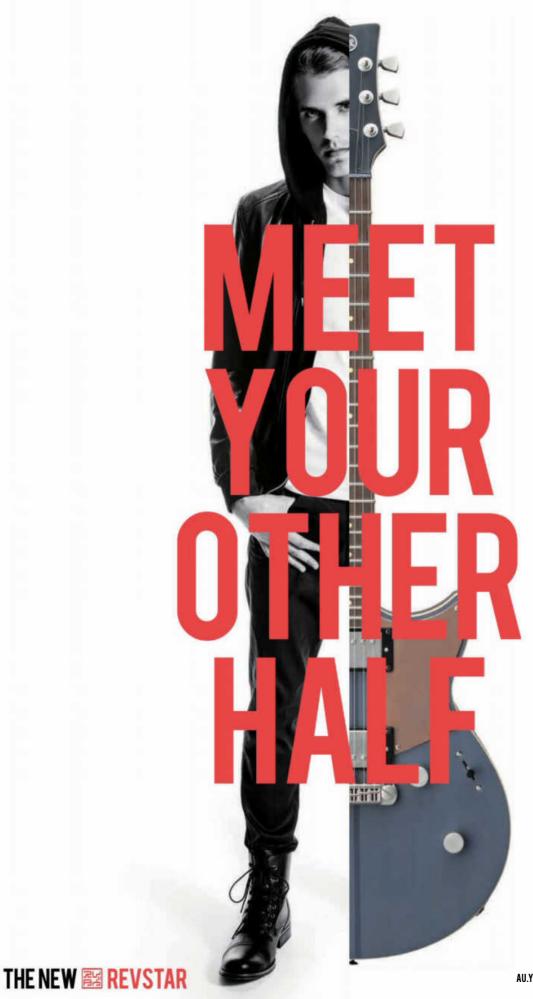
LICENSING & BUSINESS AFFAIRS: Maureen A. Lamberti (Executive Director), Aimee Schecter (Director) US OFFICES: 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104-0298; 212-484-1616

### PAPER RIOT

Rolling Stone is published in Australia monthly by Paper Riot Pty Ltd, Suite 4, 5 Wilson St, Newtown NSW 2042, ABN 9216 6626 526, Enquiries; (02) 8006 9663. Copyright © 2014 by ROLLING STONE LLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. The name ROLLING STONE and the logo thereof are registered trademarks of ROLLING STONE LLC. which trademarks have been licensed to Paper Riot Pty Ltd. For subscription inquiries visit www.magshop.com.au, email magshop@magshop. com.au or telephone 136 116 between 8am and 6pm (EST) Monday to Friday. Alternatively, post requests to Magshop, GPO Box 5252, Sydney, NSW 2000, Printed by PMP Limited, 31-35 Heathcote Road, Moorebank NSW 2170. Ph: +61 2 9828 1551. Distributed in Australia by Network Services Company, 54 Park St, Sydney, NSW 2000. ph (02) 9282 8777. Distributed in New Zealand by Gordon & Gotch (NZ) Ltd. 2 Carr Road. Mt Roskill. Auckland Phone (09) 625 3000. Rolling Stone does not assume responsibility for unsolicited materials and will return only those accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope

**RALPH J. GLEASON** 1917-1975 HUNTER S. THOMPSON 1937-2005

ISSN 1320-0615



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### **AMONG THE LOVE BOTS**

### **FEATURE**

Meet the lovelorn marks falling prey to one of today's biggest online scams: artificially intelligent dating-service accounts used to seduce people.



### 2016'S **BIG MOVIES** THE RS LIST

From superhero movies, biopics and serious dramas to a new Star Wars movie. we countdown the year's must-



### MY SOUNDTRACK **MILK! RECORDS**

Jen Cloher, Courtney Barnett and Fraser A. Gorman stopped by the Rolling Stone Australia office to tell us which songs influenced their lives.



### THE BEST **LOCAL STUFF EXCLUSIVES**

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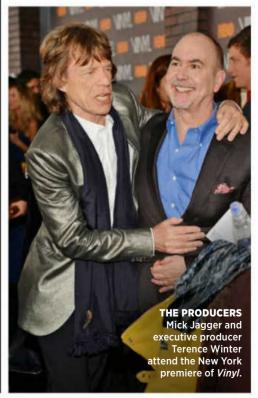
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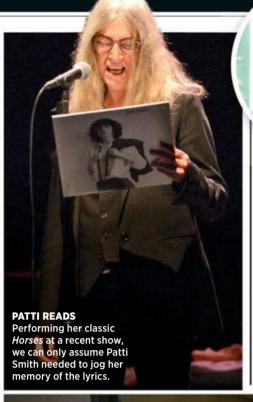
## Random Notes







SETTY IMAGES, 5





### Flaming Lips Trash Sydney For Free

Opening the Sydney Festival with a free concert in the Domain, the Flaming Lips pulled out all the stops, freaking out the crowd at the usually family-friendly event. Wayne Coyne and Co. flew sweary balloons, but there was no sign of Miley Cyrus, who was in the country, but neglected to show her face despite rumours she was going to.







### 2016: Officially Truckin'

Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann and John Mayer continued the Grateful Dead's tradition of New Year's Eve blowouts with an epic Dead & Co. show at Los Angeles' Forum. One highlight: NBA legend Bill Walton (left, with Mayer) reprised a Bill Graham stunt from the Seventies by dressing up as Father Time.



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### **EAGLES OF DEATH METAL**

[Cont. from 13] of the worst terrorist attacks in recent history. Now, the veteran garage-rock band is facing the big question: What's next?

At least part of the answer has become clear: Get back on the road. Starting this month, Eagles of Death Metal, who had postponed all remaining concerts on their autumn tour after the Paris attacks, will hit Europe for 24 dates - what they've dubbed the Nos Amis Tour (French for "our friends") in a nod to the group's affection for France. The tour includes a performance in Paris on February 16th, and the band plans to announce North American dates soon. The Eagles hope the European dates will be the beginning of two years on the road, but, says a source close to the band, "We're taking it kind of one step at a time - there's no road map for a situation like this.'

After the attacks, the band could barely contemplate getting onstage again. But an outpouring of support from fans and peers gave them strength to come back. Perhaps the strongest encouragement came from U2, who had postponed a Paris concert originally scheduled for the same weekend the attacks took place. Less than a month later, U2 returned to Paris, welcoming Eagles of Death Metal onstage for the final two songs of the night, including a cover of Patti Smith's "People Have the

Power". Then U2 ceded the stage to the Eagles, who played the feel-good "I Love You All the Time", from their 2015 album, Zipper Down. For Hughes, the evening was "a beautiful way of putting the training wheels on for performing".

"I wish I knew what [words] to put together to explain how I felt," says Josh Homme, Eagles co-founder and Queens of the Stone Age frontman, who watched it online (Homme, who does not always tour with the Eagles, wasn't present the night of the attack and did not attend the U2 show). "Can you imagine how tough that was for them?"

"I had no idea how eager the response would be," says Hughes of the Play It Forward campaign.

Before U2 and the Eagles played together, Bono called Hughes and prayed with him on the phone. "He knows that I'm a Christian, and he also knows I'm a mama's boy," Hughes says, sounding close to tears. "The very next day [after the attack], a courier came with a phone that had a note that said, 'This is from Bono. Make sure you call your mum.' I thought that was awesome. It was the first time I really got to talk to my mum without being in a police station, and that meant the whole world to me."

U2 weren't the only big-name band to offer crucial support. Zipper Down features a cover of Duran Duran's 1982 hit

"Save a Prayer"; and after the Paris tragedy, frontman Simon Le Bon decided to donate all royalties Duran Duran gets from sales of the song to charity. Hughes and Homme were so moved by the gesture that they followed Le Bon's cue, asking some fellow performers to cover Eagles of Death Metal's "I Love You All the Time" for what they're calling the Play It Forward campaign; all proceeds from sales of the song will go to the Sweet Stuff Foundation, which has offered assistance to victims of the Paris attacks. Kings of Leon, Imagine Dragons, Florence and the Machine (who collaborated with the Maccabees) and My Morning Jacket, among others, have all covered the song.

"Everyone takes something from the song and made it their own," Homme says. "Florence and the Machine's version with the Maccabees has a Celtic druther to it, too, and then [Pearl Jam drummer] Matt Cameron did an almost electronic, night-scape, futuristic version of it. And Ed Harcourt's version is a tear-jerker."

The band expects to release a new batch of Play It Forward covers sometime this month. "I had no idea how eager and how sincere the response would be," Hughes says. "As someone who really, really needed this shit personally, I couldn't feel more accomplished in our goal. There's a lot of emotion behind this stuff for us, and I think it's an emotion that's bigger than words."

DAM VETTO





### Gideon Bensen Lets Loose on Solo EP

"I'm serious

about this.

I'm not

fucking

around."

Preatures guitarist takes a break from his 'day job' to show off his wild side

known as 20 per cent of the Preatures, but this year the guitarist and singer is out to prove he's capable of steering a musical ship on his own. "I'm serious about this," he says on the eve of the release of his debut EP, Cold Cold Heart. "I'm not fucking around."

Bensen called on some of Australian music's best-regarded young talent, including vocalists Megan Washington and Montaigne and fellow Preatures guitarist Jack Moffitt, to help him record the strange, funky mate-

rial that comprises his first solo release. In late 2015, he sent the rowdy, horn-led "All New Low" to radio as an indication of just how far removed the EP's songs are from those he writes for the Preatures. "It's very much inspired by late-Eighties, early-Nineties stuff," he explains, citing latter-day new wave and post-punk as well as canonical works by Bowie and Talking Heads as touchstones. "Now that the Preatures have finished touring [debut album] *Blue Planet Eyes*, I saw an opportunity to record these songs, and I grabbed it."

Bensen laid down the EP in fits and starts, working with producer Tony Buchen (the Church, Phrase, Ronan Keating) to dial up the intensity on cuts like the

industrial-sounding "Talk Talk" and disco-inflected title track. Most of the songs were written on the road in short bursts, and Bensen tried hard to capture that sense of urgency on tape.

"Inspiration came at the shittiest, most inconvenient times,"

he says. "I'd come back from a Preatures show, exhausted, and I'd have an idea, and that was my only window. I couldn't wait until the next day, because by then I'd be back in the van."

### TOURING

### DE LA SOUL FLIP THE SCRIPT

Twenty-nine years since their formation, De La Soul are going independent. The New York-based hip-hop trio will self-release their eighth studio album, *And the Anonymous Nobody* – their first in over a decade – on April 29th. It follows a successful Kickstarter campaign they launched in early-2015, which saw them surpass their modest \$110,000 target in just nine hours, eventually raising over \$600,000.

"To see the money pot grow and grow, it was really humbling – and shocking!" says founding member Kelvin Mercer, better known as Posdnuos, who insists that despite the increased budget they "definitely stuck to what we were doing".

What they were doing was far removed from the soul sample-based format of their early work. Instead they called on tour buddies, the Rhythm All Stars, instructing the L.A-based jam band to mimic selected instrumentals from their record collections. They then began "trimming stuff up", extracting individual elements they could rework, essentially sampling themselves.

The production technique – which Mercer insists "really wasn't a reaction" to ongoing conflicts with the "sample police" – unravelled parallel to the enlisting of the eclectic support cast, which includes David Byrne, 2 Chainz, Little Dragon and Usher. "If we brought this to a very conventional label, would they understand what to do with this?" he says with a chuckle.

While first single "Train Wreck" is due later this month, Mercer remains tight-lipped on whether or not they'll preview new material at March's WOM-ADelaide Festival appearance.

"It would be awesome to do so. But right now we're just trying to get the wheels turning."



### FIVE NOTES

### **Animal Collective**

### **EXPERIMENTAL WEIRDOS GET DIRECT ON NEW ALBUM 'PAINTING WITH'**

THEY DEBUTED THE ALBUM – IN AN AIRPORT
Most bands hook up with a high-profile media entity to
preview a new album. Not Animal Collective, who secretly
debuted Painting With over the P.A. system in Baltimore airport.
"It seems like something we would have been into when we were
younger," says Dave Portner, aka Avey Tare. "Walking around the
mall and suddenly realising you were listening to a band you like
but music you'd never heard – this surreal thing."

THIS IS THE FIRST LP THEY RECORDED IN L.A.
"We always have a desire to record in a new place," says
Portner. "For me the process is, in a way, more important
than the final outcome. If the experience is disheartening that's
what I think about when I hear the record."

**'PAINTING WITH' IS A.C. AT THEIR MOST DIRECT**For this record the trio steered away from their usual layering of reverbs and delays. "We came to the table with the individual instruments each of us can play and not adding to it,"

says Portner. Part of that sound is he and Noah Lennox's near constant call-and-response syncopated singing – a first: "We wanted to break apart the idea of the lead vocalist."

JOHN CALE AND COLIN STETSON ARE GUESTS

"We love Colin's playing [but] we have an aversion to
saxophone, especially in pop or rock music," says Portner of
the experimental brass player. "We wanted to use something we're
not completely into in a way that makes us more into it."

THAT WHOLE PAINTING THEME IS ABOUT HOW ARTISTS VIEW THE WORLD

"It's about having different perspectives," says Portner of the album art and themes. "That brings to mind art forms like Dadaism and Cubism, where a lot of what that art means is a skewed version of perspectives. As a band we're very visual – we don't often talk in notes or time signatures. So when it comes down to creating something, it has a lot more to do with the visual connection that we have."



## Reopening of the 'X-Files'

Chris Carter was one of TV's brightest minds - then he left it all behind. Now he's finally resurrecting his greatest show By Neil Strauss

HE FIRST THING VISITORS NOtice upon entering the sundrenched four-storey Santa Monica office of X-Files creator Chris Carter is the artwork on the walls. Massive, imposing canvases and decorated surfboards loom overhead, each emblazoned with a unique phrase: BULLSHIT AIN'T FERTILIZER. ROTTEN ON THE IN-SIDE, GOD'S GIFT TO WOMEN.

Ask Carter what those phrases mean, and he will tell you that they are about bad experiences he's had - with sociopathic people, with the destructive force of nature, with 40 acres of farmland he bought. And so this golden temple of creativity is secretly a shrine to the dark side. This is the world of Chris

"I guess I'm looking for relevance again," he explains when asked why he chose to immortalise bad memories as his art and office decor.

Relevance? It's an oddly appropriate word to use for someone who hasn't had a new series on television in nearly 14 years. In January, however, Carter finally returned to TV with a six-episode reprise of *The X-Files*. "It's about looking for a personal relevance, a foggy window into me," he elaborates.

At the height of his productivity in the late Nineties, he was running two network TV shows - The X-Files and Millennium - in addition to writing an X-Files movie. Not long before the series' final episode, Carter decided that he needed

"After 9/11, everything changed overnight," he recalls, sitting at the large rectangular table in his office where he normally writes. A weathered, rubberband-encircled Tiffany box rests atop, stuffed with thank-you notes he's writing to the people who worked on the new episodes. A Murphy bed is pushed into the wall across from him, with two corkboards for storyboarding affixed to

"All of a sudden, talk of government conspiracies wasn't so interesting any-



"I just have a

sense that

something

greater out

there." savs

there's

Carter.

more," Carter continues. "People were looking to the government to help them. And they were too scared of re-

al-world things to be scared by a television show. It felt like a huge downbeat in the country and ... reality TV started taking all the best time slots. So it

seemed like a good time to bow out gracefully.

When the series ended, Carter, as he puts it, "dropped out" of the TV business for 10 years. "I needed to get out of small dark rooms looking at small screens," he says, blinking through piercing pale-blue eyes. "I just needed to live my life." So he parted

ways with an industry he compares to a train: "When you hop off of it, it just takes off without you."

A row of framed pictures on a shelf in Carter's office documents the result of this sabbatical. One shows him in a single-engine plane on his first solo flight; in another, he's surfing a monster wave; in the adjacent frame, he's heli-skiing; then he's climbing a mountain. Carter, who began his career as an editor at Surfing magazine, didn't really rest, it seems.

He just found intensity outdoors instead of indoors.

To fill his remaining time, Carter accepted a fellowship at the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics at University of California-Santa Barbara.

When he noticed that television was having a renaissance in the form of

shorter-run shows on cable with far fewer restrictions on language and imagery - many of them created by former members of his writing room, such as Breaking Bad's Vince Gilligan his enthusiasm for TV rekindled.

Though Carter doesn't admit this, his return to Hollywood (not counting a second X-Files

film he wrote in 2007) must have been disappointing for the man who ruled the medium a decade earlier. A series about the Salem witch trials that he created for Showtime never made it to air. Same with an Area 51 drama he worked on for AMC. And ditto for a conspiracy thriller, Unique, which he developed at Fox.

But the toughest hit was his 2014 Amazon pilot, The After, a Sartre-meets-Dante serial drama set in the intersection of Los Angeles and Hades. Carter spent a year

writing eight episodes in what was envisioned as a 99-show arc. But when the executive spearheading the project was replaced, and Carter refused to create a "show bible" explaining the series for his new boss because he prefers a more spontaneous writing process, Amazon cancelled its order for the series.

"I was excited to explore hell," Carter says. "I believe we're all in a kind of hell."

And so, 14 years after *The X-Files* ended its run, Carter is finally back on TV in a familiar guise: bringing the show, and some of its presumed-dead characters, back to life. "I hadn't quite imagined that we would have a second run," Carter says of his paranormal baby, which he describes alternately as a monster, a hydra and a Frankenstein. "It's amazing to me. There's a little bit of 'been there, done that', but it's got a whole new context, both politically and scientifically."

The current arc, which comes too late for the 2012 alien invasion prophesied at the end of the series' first run, centres on a conspiracy-theory Internet show reminiscent of Alex Jones' popular *Infowars*. To gather material, Carter attended a number of conventions, including the Secret Space Program, where speakers discussed various theories about how the world's elite are weaponising space, using alien technology, planning an overhaul of the economic system and, in general, plotting a new world order. The final episode explores Carter's interest in CRISPR – a relatively cheap and fast technique of altering genes.

"The show is kind of a search for God, because I believe science is a search for God," says Carter, who was raised Baptist in Bellflower, California, as part of the Christian Reformed Church. "During my fellowship, I worked under a Nobel physicist. He didn't believe in God. For me, it's mind-boggling that a person who deals with things that are so incredible, so beautiful that you have to believe that they were actually created by some greater power, doesn't believe in it at all.

"My wife doesn't believe in God either," Carter continues. "I just have a sense that there's something greater out there, and I think that has fuelled the stories that we tell. That poster that says, 'I want to believe'" – he gestures to the classic *X-Files* artwork on the wall – "that's me. That's me! I want to believe. I want that paranormal experience. Aliens, they owe me a visit. I've been their best PR man for the past nearly 25 years."

Close encounters notwithstanding, if the miniseries goes well, does Carter plan on keeping *The X-Files* open for further seasons?

"I think I'm going to answer for my wife," he replies, very seriously. "No."

### **Revival of the Fittest**

In the era of reboots and remakes, your favourite TV shows are never truly dead. Here are five more series getting a second life



#### **Twin Peaks**

Last Aired: 1991

Current Status: In production

What We Know: Twenty-five years after it became the freshest, weirdest thing on TV, David Lynch's noirish crime series is returning for a run on Showtime. Lynch is directing every episode, and several characters – including FBI agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) – are back. Sadly, the actress who played Log Lady died last year.



#### **Star Trek**

Last Aired: 2005 (Star Trek: Enterprise)

Current Status: Set to air in early 2017

What We Know: In the tradition of nextgen Star Trek series like Deep Space Nine, this one will feature new characters exploring new worlds. Boldly airing where no series has aired before (it will be the first new show for CBS's streaming network), it's exec-produced by Alex Kurtzman, who co-wrote the two recent Star Trek films.



#### **Mystery Science Theater 3000**

Last Aired: 1999

Current Status: In production

What We Know: A cult comedy about a janitor forced to watch terrible movies, MST3K roared back to life thanks to a record-breaking Kickstarter campaign that raised nearly \$6 million. Creator Joel Hodgson will oversee the episodes, which will feature a new cast – including comedians Patton Oswalt and Jonah Ray.



#### **Xena Warrior Princess**

Last Aired: 2001

Current Status: In development

What We Know: Who's the new Xena? That's what fans of the battle-scarred Greek heroine are wondering. The series plans to focus on younger warriors, meaning Lucy Lawless won't return to the title role. "This will be a true reboot, but not one as radical as some of the fans fear," says writer Javier Grillo-Marxuach.



#### **Full House**

Last Aired: 1995

Current Status: Airs in the U.S. this month

What We Know: The original cast (minus the Olsen twins) will be back for Fuller House. The sitcom still involves a widowed parent, only this time it's now-grown-up D.J. (Candace Cameron Bure). "It has a very familiar vibe," says creator Jeff Franklin, "although it is very much a show that feels set in today's world."

Rick Ross

On his house arrest, loving Star Wars and Adele, and his secret for staying in shape (hint: it involves weed)

By Simon Vozick-Levinson

AST YEAR WAS A ROUGH ONE FOR Rick Ross, who spent most of the summer and autumn of 2015 under house arrest at his Atlanta mansion due to a pending case involving the alleged assault and kidnapping of a former groundskeeper. "I had a few stumbles, most definitely," the rap superstar tells ROLLING STONE, "Fortunately, it wasn't the worst home to be confined in, you dig? But it wasn't a vacation." To avoid going stircrazy, he spent much of that time writing songs for his eighth studio album, Black Market, which is full of rich production, multilayered boasts and, at times, a more reflective tone than usual. "I love the uptempo club music that's going on right now, but I wanted to step away from that sound," he says. "I made this album a little more soulful and sophisticated by adding live guitars

One of the best songs on this album is called "Crocodile Python". What does that even mean?

and shit like that."

I recorded that on my first night back in the studio. When the beat came on, I rubbed my fingers together and imagined the texture: "Crocodile python, that's what this material is." I thought that was a dope-ass title.

There's a song where you say you'll "assassinate Trump like I'm Zimmerman". What made you say that?

I would never advocate violence on Trump or anyone. It's lyrical assassination. That's me being a poet, putting words together, with no violence in my heart at all. Matter of fact, my cameraman was Trump's caddy at his golf course for five years, and he says Trump is cool as fuck. You remixed Adele's "Hello." Are you a big fan?

I love Adele. When I see her, I may kiss Adele. She speaks for so many people. When I hear her voice, I stop and make that face and say, "What the fuck, man?" I just gaze off into the sky for a second and think creatively. I've got a beat ready for her if I ever run across her.

You've lost a lot of weight in the past few years. How do you keep it off?

I've lost maybe 70 or 75 pounds. I do my "RossFit" that's CrossFit mixed with a blunt or two. I still eat my Wingstop, but I got rid of a lot of the soda and the rice and all that nonsense.

Do you ever miss being "the biggest boss", in terms of your physical size?

No, man [laughs]. I've still got my boss belly. I'll always have that.

You've got Darth Vader's mask tattooed on your body. You're a big Star Wars fan?

Of course! I got an eight-inch Darth Vader on my left side, man! And my favourite car out of my entire collection is a '57 Chevy that I named Vader.

#### How come he's your favourite?

That's the big homey! My father watched all the Star Trek and Star Wars that you could imagine, along with the martial arts. So I was into all that as a youngster, and I always rooted for the bad guy.

> Meek Mill is signed to your label, and you've made a few songs with Drake, How did you feel when those two guys started going after each other on record last year?

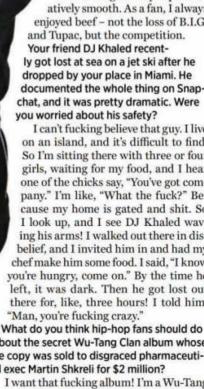
I didn't like it, but I've seen worse. I'm glad they kept it relatively smooth. As a fan, I always enjoyed beef - not the loss of B.I.G. and Tupac, but the competition.

ly got lost at sea on a jet ski after he dropped by your place in Miami. He documented the whole thing on Snapchat, and it was pretty dramatic. Were you worried about his safety?

I can't fucking believe that guy. I live on an island, and it's difficult to find. So I'm sitting there with three or four girls, waiting for my food, and I hear one of the chicks say, "You've got company." I'm like, "What the fuck?" Because my home is gated and shit. So I look up, and I see DJ Khaled waving his arms! I walked out there in disbelief, and I invited him in and had my chef make him some food. I said, "I know you're hungry, come on." By the time he left, it was dark. Then he got lost out there for, like, three hours! I told him, "Man, you're fucking crazy."

about the secret Wu-Tang Clan album whose sole copy was sold to disgraced pharmaceutical exec Martin Shkreli for \$2 million?

I want that fucking album! I'm a Wu-Tang fan. If I gotta buy it back from RZA and bootleg it for the people, I'll do it - just for me and the real Wu-Tang fans that still put "Wu-Tang Clan Ain't Nuthing ta Fuck Wit" in rotation when they want to pop shit.



## 2016 GIBSON'S BEST YEAR EVER

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### The Jezabels' Surprise Return

Frontwoman Hayley Mary talks about the album that almost never was

By Andrew P. Street

HIS IS GOING TO SOUND RANdom, but I've been thinking about Pope Francis the last few days."

This is not a statement one would expect Hayley Mary to make early in an interview about the Jezabels' third album. The frontwoman is sitting in a busy café in Sydney's inner west, drinking volcanic-strength coffees and talking about the long and winding road that led to *Synthia*, their unexpected third album: unexpected both in its confidence and quality after the troubled gestation of their previous album, 2014's *The Brink*, and in that no-one knew it was coming, least of all the four people who created it.

"I'm just really excited, inexplicably, because I feel there is a change in the air," she declares with passion. "This Pope is talking about the environment and the theology of women, there are revolutions going on – I'm really excited about the world."

Mary's a non-believer these days. "I ignored Catholicism, because I grew

up Catholic," she laughs. "Catholic guilt permeated my family, even when we didn't actually practice any-

#### RENEWED

Heather Shannon, Nik Kaloper, Hayley Mary, Sam Lockwood

more. But I started seeing things about this Pope, and he talks about the genius of women needing to be involved in important decisions. And I feel that Tony Abbott was not accepted in Australia when 10 years ago he probably would have been in for decades. He really mobilised people to go, 'No no NO! We're not complacent, what the fuck is going on here?'"

Complacency has never been an issue with the Jezabels. Whisper it quietly, but it wasn't a done deal that there would even be a third album. Mary insists that the band never discussed split- [Cont. on 24]





#### **THE JEZABELS**

[Cont. from 22] ting up, but The Brink was the archetype of the Difficult Second Album: sales were good, but critical reception was mixed, and touring for the album proved unexpectedly brutal.

"We definitely cracked," she sighs. "We worked too hard and we toured too much, and it took its toll on us, physically and emotionally. And working hard is good, but in some ways we worked too hard and in others we didn't work hard enough. [The rest of the band] are all workaholics so they would have just kept going, but I was like, 'I think you guys need a holiday, and I'm taking one so you have to have one."

Once the touring was done the members scattered. Drummer Nik Kaloper decamped to the UK, keyboardist Heather Shannon started pre-medicine studies, and guitarist Samuel Lockwood ignored music for a bit and "kept himself busy landscaping and just living again". Mary, however, took instruction from the words of William Blake: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

"I went to America, hired a Ford Mustang convertible and I drove from L.A. to Vegas, and I lived a life of hedonism for three-to-six months. I hung out with proper rock & rollers who still think it's the Seventies and take a lot of drugs and have a lot of sex," she laughs. "It was great!"

She then headed across the pond to London, "and I was meeting all these bands that had the

look of the golden age of British music, but had all these backwards attitudes. And it really made me wonder about the current state of rock & roll. I'd say 'I'm a feminist' and they'd say, 'But you're too pretty to be a feminist!' What the *fuck*? I felt like a groupie, because that's how they saw me. Being away from the Jezabels and out of the small world which we created was a bit of an eye-opener."

In 2015 a gig commitment drew them all back to Sydney again. "We just got together to rehearse for a show, and we were suddenly like, 'Nah, let's just jam.' It was glorious! It was like back in the day, because there was the opposite of pressure. We wrote four songs that week, and forgot to rehearse."

The enthusiasm for making music together collided with the ideas about sex, identity, feminism and self-determination that were swirling around Mary's head. "I just came back from the UK really wanting to make a record. Like, really excited

for the first time in years, and feeling like the stuff I wanted to talk about was more valid than it ever was. And the band was like, 'Yeah, let's do it!'"

This burst of inspiration had some consequences: "Nik and I were planning on moving back to the UK, but we thought, 'Let's just stay until we write a record.' And that took a few months, but it was quite quick – and Lachlan [Mitchell, producer] lives around the corner and he was like, 'Let's just make it."

So what made the difference? "It's not the second record," she says bluntly. "There's a little bit of abandon, and you're better at what you're doing. You know how to function together."

comes to telling me to smile? Don't tell me what to do." She rolls her eyes. "Because it happens *a lot*."

Anyone concerned that Mary's descent into the international rock & roll underbelly might have turned the band into swaggering rock pigs can breathe easy: as befits an album named *Synthia*, Shannon's new collection of keyboards dominate the record.

"In a way the synthesiser is retro, and in another way it's more futuristic and guitar music seems more retro," Mary suggests. "I know there's a romanticism about guitar music and the blues, but in the Seventies there was this feeling of, 'No, let's go forward and use computers and machines.'



STUDIO DAYS

The Jezabels (I-r: Mary, Lockwood, Kaloper, Shannon) with producer Lachlan Mitchell.

Synthia is the most explicitly sexual album the band have ever made – although Mary shies away from using the F word.

"I don't want to use the word 'feminist'," she says. "A lot of people just cringe – like my father, and guys I know, even good people! But people are really shifting: even my dad, I think maybe because of the Pope."

That said, the album pulls few punches with regard to sexual politics.

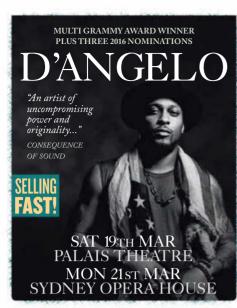
"There are a few songs on the record that are about that, with sex. Just 'lighten up about it'. Songs like 'If Ya Want Me' and 'Pleasure Drive' – they're personal, but also just how I feel about sex in general. Like with 'Smile', for example: it's saying, 'I'm not a prude, I don't hate sex, I don't hate men, I might like you, you can express yourself, if you want to whistle it doesn't actually bother me.' But when it

Kraftwerk as opposed to the Beatles. Other things can be rock & roll."

For the past three years, there's been a shadow hanging over the Jezabels that they'd kept under wraps: just before work began on *The Brink*, Shannon had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer. The initial prognosis was good and the band continued to operate; however, a couple of weeks after this interview, the quartet received news Shannon's cancer had aggressively returned.

"She's started treatment, and she's in positive spirits," Mary explains down the line from London, confirming that touring plans have been put on hold for the foreseeable future. "She's been very strong the last few years. Despite the cancer, we've been able to maintain this reasonable level of scheduling. She's kind of amazing.

"We can't tour, because the whole band can't be there. But it feels symbolically nice to put the album out. We're very proud of it. It's been an intense time for us all."











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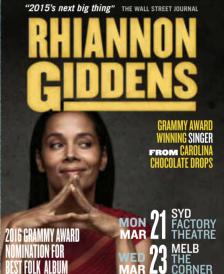


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### TOURING

### Double Header Down Under

Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings plot a return to Australia – with a little help from Courtney Barnett

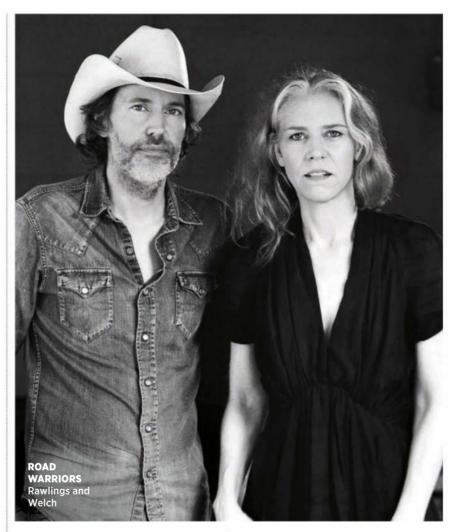
HOSE WERE FANTASTIC crowds," says Gillian Welch of her 2004 tour of Australia with musical companion Dave Rawlings. "I felt like I would've felt right at home in any of the [audience members'] record collections. We've been really excited to come back – I'm not just saying that!"

"That was an amazing tour [in 2004], and an amazing experience for us," agrees Rawlings, just minutes after walking off stage in Buffalo, New York, touring behind *Nashville Obsolete*, his latest release with Welch under the Dave Rawlings Machine banner.

In the intervening 11 years, the world's appetite for all things alt. country-Americana has only intensified. And few artists working in the genre have elicited such enduring admiration as Welch and Rawlings: the Woodland Studios bosses building a devoted following with their preternatural harmonies, Rawlings' signature acoustic picking style, and Welch's singular lyrical and vocal turns. The announcement of a joint Gillian Welch-Dave Rawlings Machine Australian double-header this January and February, then, has generated ample buzz.

Their visit will comprise two distinct tours: the first in Gillian Welch mode - or "The Duet", as they refer to it - showcasing tunes from Welch's stellar catalogue including 2001 breakout LP Time (The Revelator) and 2011 landmark The Harrow & the Harvest, kicking off in Perth before visiting Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Phase two will find the pair performing in DRM mode with accompaniment from current Machine fixtures Willie Watson (ex-Old Crow Medicine Show), bassist Paul Kowert (Punch Brothers), and fiddler Brittany Haas (Crooked Still), appearing in Brisbane before journeying back down the east coast to Bangalow, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. The Gillian Welch leg of the tour quickly sold out its Melbourne and Sydney dates, prompting extra shows in both cities.

In a suitably ambitious move, Welch and Rawlings will undertake both tours entirely in road-trip format – including tackling the lonesome drive across the Nullarbor between Perth and Melbourne.



"That's the way we like to tour," Welch explains. "We do all our own driving. The truth is, Dave and I, we drive all the time from Nashville to Los Angeles, which is 2,000 miles. That's nothin' to us – we do that in one shot, 26-and-a-half hours. If we can do that, I think we're gonna do fine!"

Welch and Rawlings have maintained a formidably heavy U.S. touring schedule since their last visit, enlisting the help of some heavyweight temporary band members along the way.

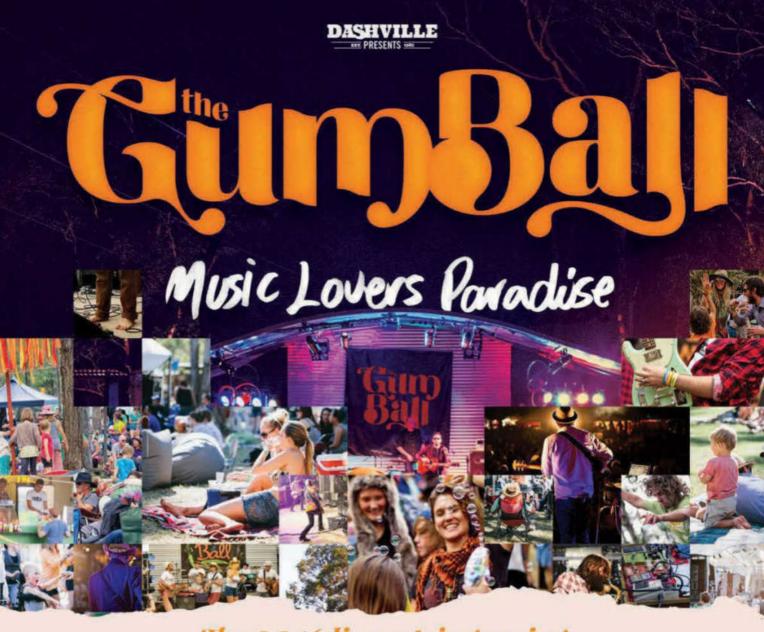
"John Paul Jones from Led Zeppelin came out and played a bunch of shows with us last year," recalls Rawlings. "We've played with so many great acoustic musicians over our lifetime, and one of our favourite things playing as Dave Rawlings Machine is that we get to go out down the road with these people who we wouldn't have the opportunity to play with otherwise."

As it turns out, the duo enlisted a little local help in selecting venues to host their unique brand of rambling folk and Appalachian-inspired Americana in 2016.

"I called Courtney Barnett!" Welch laughs. "We met her at Newport Folk Festival – David and I were there, kind of, curating the 50th anniversary of Dylan going electric, and Courtney and her band were there, too. So we met her, and I really dig her stuff. So when we started talking about this tour I e-mailed her and said, 'Hey, you as the listener – where would you like to see our show?' So she gave me some names!"

On their 2004 tour Welch and Rawlings battled laryngitis, among other ailments.

"When we weren't onstage last time, we were in bed," says Welch. "My memories of being down there are solely of the shows. It's OK, that's what we were there to do – I didn't go down there to drive around and see marsupials!"



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## Lemmy Kilmister

Remembering the Motörhead frontman, who lived as hard and fast as his band played

**Bv David Browne** 

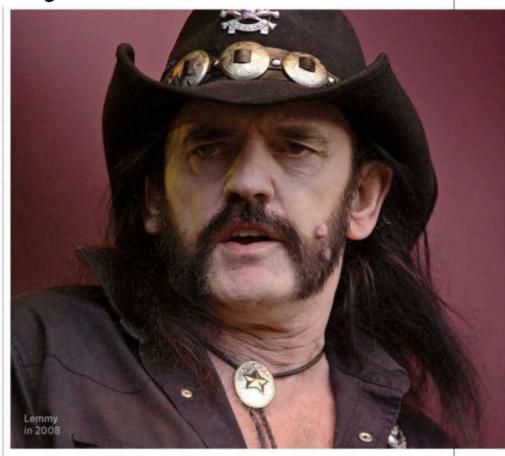
HE DAY AFTER CHRIST-mas, Lemmy Kilmister's doctor visited the Motör-head frontman at his condo in West Hollywood to deliver some bad news. Kilmister, who had been slurring his words lately, learned he'd been diagnosed with terminal brain and neck cancer. At most, he had six months to live.

Kilmister took the news well – soon, he was cracking jokes and playing video games. Then, on December 28th, he nodded off and never woke up. He was 70. "I don't know how he was able to go so quick," says Todd Singerman, his manager. "He must have willed himself and said, 'Fuck this.' He did it on his terms, once again."

From his loud, fast, uncompromising music to his mythic drug and alcohol use, Kilmister did everything his way. As founder, bassist and gargoyle-voiced leader of Motörhead, he exerted a massive influence over four decades of heavy metal. "Lemmy is probably one of the absolute primary reasons I wanted to be in a band," says Metallica's Lars Ulrich. "In 1979, I was in a record store and the double-bass intro to 'Overkill' started. I never heard anything like that in my life. This music took me to a place I had never been." After hearing of Kilmister's death, Dave Grohl, a close friend, had an ace of spades tattooed on his wrist, a tribute to Motörhead's most popular song.

One of rock & roll's most memorable characters, Kilmister lived like a pirate, dressed like a biker, never covered his protruding facial moles and didn't suffer fools. (Interviewer: "You don't believe in God?" Lemmy: "I believe I'll have a drink.") A collector of all kinds of war memorabilia, he stuffed his apartment with Nazi paraphernalia, including Eva Braun's hairbrush, though his interest was purely historical. "I only collect the stuff – I didn't collect the ideas," he once said. (Singerman says at least part of that collection will be donated to museums.)

Yet despite his hard-boiled persona, Kilmister had a warm, hospitable side. He



"I asked Lemmy, 'When was the last time you slept?'" says Ozzy Osbourne. "He said, '10, 12 days ago.' Motörhead gave a new meaning to partying."

was known for giving cash to friends (and strangers) who were down on their luck, and for welcoming young musicians into his fold. "He was a parental figure – someone you felt completely safe with," Ulrich says. "You were never judged."

Born in 1945 in Staffordshire, England, the son of a minister and a librarian, Lemmy was raised in North Wales and was swept up in rock & roll early on: He caught the Beatles at the Cavern Club and worked briefly as a roadie for Jimi Hendrix. In 1971, he joined the prog-rock band Hawkwind. Although he and co-founder Dave Brock would remain friends until Lemmy's death, Kilmister was kicked out of the band in 1975, due to a drug bust in Canada and his epic speed use. "He'd be

up for a few days and then fall asleep," says Brock. "He'd be sitting up in bed with his book, and he'd fall asleep with his eyes open. I would think, 'Fucking hell – has he died?' He got to 70, and I didn't think he'd get to 50."

Kilmister quickly rebounded, forming his own band. The group almost called itself Bastard, before finally settling on Motörhead. On classic albums like 1980's Ace of Spades and the 1981 live epic No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith, Motörhead formed a missing link between metal and punk. (Kilmister later boasted that he helped teach Sid Vicious how to play bass.) Over the course of 22 albums, several personnel changes and even a Grammy (in 2005), the band's brutal sound hardly wavered. "Lemmy was never a sellout," says director Penelope Spheeris, who featured Kilmister in the 1988 doc The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years. "Nobody else sounded like that. You always knew it was a Motörhead song."

GETTY IMAGE

As longtime friend Ozzv Osbourne learned when he and Motörhead toured the States together in 1981, Motörhead were as relentless backstage as they were onstage. "I remember saying to Lemmy at one point, 'Do you ever sleep?'" Osbourne recalls. "And he goes, 'Well, not much.' I go, 'When was the last time you slept?' He said, 'Let me think. Ten, 12 days ago.' They'd walk around with bourbon all the time. I was hitting it pretty hard as well, but nothing like them. They put a new fucking meaning to partying.

Kilmister was unrepentant about his lifestyle. "There's a lot of shit talked about what's bad for you, especially in America," he told Rolling Stone in 2009. "Everyone wants to be safe. Well, I got news for you: You can't be safe. Life's not safe. Your work isn't safe. When you leave the house, it isn't safe. The air you breathe isn't going to be safe, not for very long. That's why you

have to enjoy the moment."

In 1990, Kilmister moved to Los Angeles, within walking distance of his favourite hangout, the Rainbow Bar and Grill, where he became such a fixture that no one else was allowed to sit in his chair. "He was always in a booth with a lot of gorgeous women around him, looking like he was the king of the world," Spheeris recalls.

Motörhead toured and recorded regularly - their latest album, Bad Magic, was released last year - but Lemmy's health became an issue. He'd long suffered from diabetes. To ward off heart arrhythmia, a cardioverter defibrillator was implanted in his chest in 2013. He continued taking speed every day nearly right up until his death, but in one concession to aging, he switched from several packs of cigarettes a day to one a week and gave up Jack Daniel's for vodka and orange juice, telling Singerman, "Orange juice is good for you."

Last September, an infection in Lemmy's lungs forced Motörhead to cancel shows. "I texted and said, 'Just stop for a while'," says Brock. "He wrote back, 'Oh, don't worry about me - I'm all right." Lemmy roused himself to continue touring, playing a final show in Berlin last December. (Plans to release a DVD of two of his last concerts are in the works.) Two days later, he attended his 70th-birthday party at an L.A. club, where he was feted by Ulrich, Slash, Duff McKagan, Billy Idol and others. Looking weak and thin, he didn't join any of the other musicians onstage.

Yet it's the other image of Lemmy - indefatigable, fearless, seemingly invincible - that will remain. "We used to have a standing joke with each other: 'Which one of us is going to go first?" remembers Osbourne. "He said to me one time, 'What's the point of living to 99 if you're not enjoying it? It's my life and I want to have fun with it.' ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY KORY GROW



### **Natalie Cole**

She escaped her father's shadow and won nine Grammys - but dark times were never far off

S THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND LEARNED, THERE WAS more to Natalie Cole than sweet ballads. At a benefit in 2011, she joined the band for three songs - including, at her request, "Whipping Post". "We were like, 'That's odd – but cool'," recalls guitarist Warren Haynes. "She said, 'I'm a rocker at heart' - and she killed it.'

Cole, who died of heart failure on December 31st at 65, was first known as the daughter of Nat "King" Cole, who died when she was 15. In college, she worked toward a pre-med degree, but eventually followed in her father's footsteps, earning a Grammy for Best New Artist with her first single, 1975's "This Will Be". Her impressive, young-Aretha pipes led to more hits, including "Sophisticated Lady" and a cover of Bruce Springsteen's "Pink Cadillac". "When she did all those crazy high vocals in 'I've Got Love on My Mind', it gave me chills," says longtime friend Patti LaBelle. "She never walked in her father's shadow."

But Cole also had a dark side. Before she was famous, she battled heroin addiction and worked the streets of Harlem for a pimp (she was, in her words, "the come-on girl, the cutie pie who would pique the attention of potential johns"). In the early Eighties, she was addicted to cocaine. "I think the drugs were just waiting to happen," she wrote in her memoir, "a culmination of not having resolved things in my life. My father's death was the beginning.... Cole eventually checked into rehab, and her 1991 album, Unforgettable... With Love, featuring a posthumous collaboration with her father on his hit "Unforgettable", won a Grammy for Album of the Year.

Recently, Cole battled hepatitis C and kidney disease and had a kidney transplant. Before her death, she was hoping to record a raw, Chess-style blues album with producer Don Was, who oversaw one of her last sessions: a duet with Van Morrison for his most recent album. "There was a sweetness and excitement in her voice," Was says. "She had a real spark to her, and Van was knocked out by it. Some people have that power." DAVID BROWNE

### **TRIBUTES**

## Stevie Wright

The vocalist, one of Australia's first international pop stars, died after years of ill heath. By Jeff Apter

Look no further than 2005's WaveAid benefit concert, where it took Bernard Fanning, Phil Jamieson and Jet's Chris Cester, aka the Wrights, to re-create Wright's "Evie (Parts 1, 2 & 3)", perhaps the greatest rock song ever recorded in this country. Yet during Wright's best-known performance of "Evie", during 1979's Sydney Opera House Concert of the Decade, he even found time to throw a backflip mid-song, dazzling the 150,000-plus crowd. This was hardly out of character for livewire Wright, who died on December 27th after a lengthy struggle with poor health. He was 68.

Though born in Scotland, Stevie Wright's life took shape in Sydney's Villawood Migrant Hostel. There he met Harry Vanda, George Young, Dick Diamonde and Gordon 'Snowy' Fleet; the diminutive Wright was 16 when they formed the Easybeats in 1964, who fast became Australia's Beatles, combining raw power, pop smarts and undeniable sex appeal.

"Stevie was just a born entertainer," recalled drummer Fleet. "He was electrifying. There'd be girls jumping on top of him. It was so exciting."

"Stevie was the original Mr Dynamite," said Philip Morris, who photographed Wright at various stages of his career, "the most energetic and charismatic performer I have ever seen. And absolutely amazing to photograph."

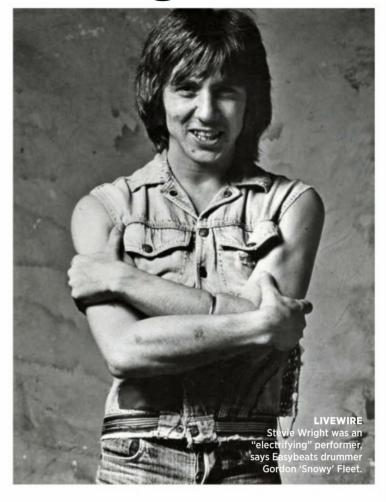
The Easybeats' hits, many co-written by Wright, now play like an Oz rock jukebox: "Sorry", "Wedding Ring", "She's So Fine", "For My Woman", "Come and See Her" and "I'll Make You Happy" all reached the Top 10 in a purple patch between June 1965 to late

1966. A relocation to the UK led to "Friday on My Mind", a Top 10 hit in the UK and a U.S. Top 20 (later covered by David Bowie and Bruce Springsteen). They returned to Australia in 1969 and played their final shows, signing off with the rootsy single "St Louis".

Wright's life started to come apart while working on the Australian version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1972. He noticed a piano player slumped over his keyboard, lost in music. "I said, 'What's with him?' And somebody said, 'He's on heroin.' So that's it, I got into it and it made me violently ill," Wright said during an *Australian Story* episode in 2013. "My illness lasted for nearly three days. And I got up and thought, 'I'll have another go at this', you know, 'I'll win, I'll beat it.' And by the time I'd beaten it, it had me."

Remarkably, despite his descent into addiction, Wright, with the help of Vanda and Young, soon produced his finest solo work: "Evie", a national Number One in 1974, and the albums *Hard Road* (1974) and *Black Eyed Bruiser*, released the year after. He married Gail Baxter and they had a son, Nicholas, but it became clear that smack was Wright's first love; the relationship, and his career, fell apart.

Wright signed on for 'deep sleep therapy' at Chelmsford Hospital. "I was told, 'You go to sleep. Two weeks later you wake up and



you're drug and pain free." But Wright had a very different experience. "I woke up very frightened. I thought I was Jack Nicholson [in *Cuckoo's Nest*]." He also underwent 14 electric shock treatments

Wright soon drifted into a life of petty crime and alcoholism, "swapping the witch for the bitch", in his own words. An Easybeats reunion tour ensued in October 1986, but his subsequent appearances were sporadic. The alcoholic Wright spent four years housebound, with his new partner Fay Walker; he also spent 14 months in a nursing home. Finally, in 2002, he returned to the spotlight for the Long Way to the Top national tour.

"Stevie encapsulates everything about Australian music," said Jet's Nic Cester in 2004, upon the release of Wright's memoir *Hard Road*. "He was a bruiser with a cheeky smile," said You Am I's Tim Rogers. Rogers sang Wright's "Hard Road" at his Sydney memorial service in January.

In 2011 Scott McRae developed a theatrical production, 'Stevie'. Sometimes Wright would attend and sing during the 'Evie' finale.

While it's tempting to remember Wright as a damaged rock & roll veteran, struggling to sing 'Evie' one last time, it's probably best to think of him as the human dynamo of the Easybeats in their prime, our first great frontman, a wild fire burning in his eyes.

### **GLENN FREY,** 1948-2016

### The Eagles co-founder wrote some of their biggest hits

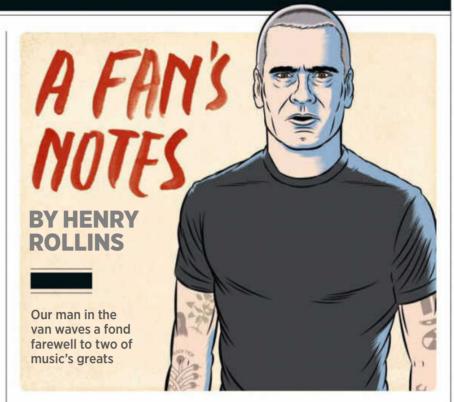
Glenn Frey, Eagles guitarist and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee. passed away last month. He was 67. "It is with the heaviest of hearts that we announce the passing of our comrade. Eagles founder. Glenn Frev. in New York City on Monday, January 18th, 2016. Glenn fought a courageous battle for the past several weeks but, sadly, succumbed to complications from Rheumatoid Arthritis. Acute Ulcerative Colitis and Pneumonia." the Eagles wrote in a statement.

The Detroit-born Frey performed with groups in the Motor City area before he relocated to Los Angeles in the late Sixties, eventually living in an apartment with J.D. Souther, his partner in the short-lived Longbranch Pennywhistle, and singersongwriter Jackson Browne. It was Souther who encouraged Linda Ronstadt, his girlfriend at the time, to hire Frey as well as three other artists - drummer Don Henley, bassist Randy Meisner and guitarist Bernie Leadon - to serve as her backing band during a 1971 tour. When the trek concluded, the Eagles were born. A year later, the inaugural lineup released their 1972 self-titled LP, featuring the Frey and Brownepenned "Take It Easy" and the Frey-sung "Peaceful Easy Feeling". The Eagles would reach their peak in 1976 with Hotel California, with the title-track - penned by Frey, Henley and guitarist Don Felder - winning the Grammy for Record of the Year.

Frey released five solo LPs, the last, 2012's After Hours, coming five years after the Eagles' 2007 comeback, Long Road Out Of Eden. DANIEL KREPS

News of Glenn Frey's passing arrived just as RS was going to press. See rollingstoneaus.com for our full tribute.





OR FANS ALL OVER THE WORLD, it was a cosmic 1-2 punch to lose Lemmy Kilmister and David Bowie within the space of a few days. Both were adored and respected by millions all over the world. I count myself as one who will truly miss both of these unique, amazing artists.

Is there any silver lining to be found in this otherwise dark cloud? I believe there is.

Not only did both give us staggering catalogues that we can listen to forever, they both handed in excellent records as their final artistic contributions.

David Bowie's Blackstar is start-to-finish brilliance. Not only is the music incredible and not relying on past allies, Mr. B brought in fresh talent and made what is easily one of his best records, which is a hell of a thing to say considering the astonishing work he gave us over the decades. Black-

star's lyrics deal with his condition and what he knew the outcome would be but unsurprisingly, bring so much more to bear. He was mysterious and singular to the end. After I got the sad news of his passing, I listened to Blackstar three times that day as I went through states of fascination and grief. David Bowie is one of the greatest things to happen to music.

Motörhead's Bad Magic finds the band in fine, bone crushing form. They were amazingly consistent. After so many albums over so many years, you would think that things would have settled in to dialled-in tedium but the band are absolutely ferocious. On Bad Magic, Lemmy gives one of his best lyrics that perhaps sums up the man on the song "Till the End".

"Don't tell me what to do my friend/ You'll break more hearts than you can mend/I know myself like no one else/ Nothing to defend. All I know is who I am /I'll never let you down/The last one you can trust until the end."

That last lyric in particular is how I will always remember Lemmy. He was a damn good man who kept it real. I once

asked him for some help on a benefit record I was making. He said yes. I asked him why it was so easy to get him to come aboard. "You're my friend. You said you needed me." THAT was Lemmy.

I would not necessarily think that both men have the same fans but I

wouldn't go anywhere near the idea that the interests would be mutually exclusive. The truth is that we just lost two massively influential and inspirational forces in the world of music.

Our sadness is a testament to just how great music is and how truly important it is to have it in our lives on a continual basis. Both men left us with soundtracks for our lives. This is to be celebrated. There is no way they would want us to be sad for too long. Better yet, we should keep those records spinning.

"We just lost two massively influential forces in the world of music."

### **MY SOUNDTRACK**

## Janet Weiss

When the end is nigh, Sleater-Kinney's drummer wants

Jeff Tweedy in her ears By Rod Yates

### The First Song I Learned To Play

The Church "One Day", 1983



"I got a guitar when I was 16, and I learned a whole album, Seance, by the Church. I could play every song, especially 'One Day'. That was a

turning point, when you can play an actual song. The first song I learned on drums? I became a drummer at 22 and the first songs I learned [were by] the band I had just joined, called the Furies. I had never played the drums, and I joined the band and had to learn their record."

### The Song That Changed My Life

**Elton John** "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road", 1973



"I was in grade school, and that was the first song I became obsessed with. That was the first song where I tore apart every word, every

instrument, I listened to it a million times. I remember sitting on the floor of the living room on the shag rug, putting it on over and over and over, and I think that obsession with music carried through for me. I could transport myself out of where I was and I could exist in this fantasy world of music. That was the first song that showed me that was possible."

### The Song I Sing at Karaoke

The Hollies " $The Air That \, I \, Breathe$ ", 1974



"I've done a lot of karaoke in my life. Like, *a lot*. "The Air That I Breathe' [is my] go-to if I need it, but I try not to duplicate too much. I like to

try new songs, keep it fresh. I have a really boring voice so anything that doesn't involve too much soul or too much inflection or personality is good for me! There was a time in my life where we would go several times a week. I even had my own karaoke rig at my house and people would come over and sing. Not so much now, this is the old days. Corin [Tucker, vocals/guitar] had a karaoke party for her birthday."

### The Song I'm Most Proud Of

Sleater-Kinney "Let's Call It Love", 2005



"It's just kind of brutalising, it takes you by the throat; there's a lot going on in the song, it's very intense and driving, and when I listen

to it I can hear the three of us really pushing ourselves onto the edge, onto the precipice of the unknown and playing beyond ourselves. Corin's vocal definitely took a while for her to get, and it's a feat, it transports you to some other place. And then it has an II-minute improvisation at the end. It's very challenging to expose yourself like that and show the world what's going on inside your body – to me improv really does that, and that song really does that. It's very expressive, very raw."

### The Song That Cheers Me Up

The B-52's "Rock Lobster", 1979



"I just don't know how you couldn't be in a good mood listening to that song, it's so playful, and so hilarious, and also just a great song. It

always makes me feel good. I heard it at every party I ever went to at high school, the B-52's and the Talking Heads were the soundtrack to my high school parties. And some disco. We met Cindy [Wilson, vocals] on our last tour when we played in Atlanta, and Carrie [Brownstein] is the biggest B-52's fan, so we had to just move out of the way and let her fan-girl. We all fan-girled some, but for Carrie it was a big deal to meet her. And she was so cool."

### The Song I'd Listen To If My Plane Was Going Down

Wilco "Via Chicago", 1999



"I thought everyone had a plan for this, but I was mistaken. Not everyone thinks about these morbid things! But I've always thought if

the plane's going down I want Jeff Tweedy singing in my ear buds, and especially the song 'Via Chicago'. I just feel like his voice is like a blanket, it really makes me feel like everything's going to be OK, even though most likely the plane's crashing and everything's not going to be OK. There's got to be someone else out there that's thought of this besides me!"

### The Song I Want Played At My Funeral

The James Gang "Funk #49", 1970



"This is funny cause I actually do talk about this. I have thought about it. It's just the dumbest, goofiest, funnest song and people would have

to smile. It would bring some humour to it. It's a rock song, which I love, it's got a great riff, but mostly it would add some humour to an otherwise probably not that funny event."

### The Song That's Guaranteed to Get Me on the Dancefloor

Michael Jackson "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough", 1979



"The first three songs on *Off The Wall*, any of those would get me dancing, no doubt. How would I describe my dancing style? Boring, I

guess! [Laughs] I'm a drummer – I have decent rhythm, I probably dance like most drummers. We have rhythm. We're not gonna be the best dancer on the floor but we definitely won't be the worst."

### The Song That Makes Me Cry

Jimmy Cliff "Many Rivers To Cross", 1969



"When I was in high school I was a huge Clash fan, and they were really into this movie *The Harder They Come*, so I went and saw

that and bought the soundtrack, and this song is on it. And I've put it on many, many mixtapes. It's just so sad, and his voice, and the notes, everything about it is just melancholy. The person singing has such a journey ahead of them and it's so difficult and trying; it sounds like such a good person in that song."

DAM VEED







were completely unknown and unsigned at that time and

I was just starting out as a photographer. Their strange

limited edition LP from Max's later that year, which was

released in 2014."

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# We profile five of the hottest

we profile five of the hottest artists who are climbing the charts, breaking the Internet or just dominating our office stereos...

## **SAMPA THE GREAT**

**SOUNDS LIKE:** J Dilla providing beats for a poetry era Jill Scott

FOR FANS OF: Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu, Jill Scott

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: The Zambia born, Botswana raised, now Sydney residing Sampa the Great first piqued interest with her scorching single "FEMALE", her wandering rhymes sliding over a snaking bass line and skip-hop production. Along with main collaborator, Sydney beatmaker Godriguez, her 2015 debut LP The Great Mixtape is an endlessly fascinating listen: spoken word poetry and loosely slung rap collides with Dilla inspired beats, as Sampa pulls apart gender politics, racism, and the price of fame. The record was subsequently spun by notable U.S. station KCRW, while back home Sampa and Godriguez notched up support slots with Hiatus Kaiyote. 2016 is already looking busy - they're appearing at boutique Melbourne festival Sugar Mountain before they knuckle down for a support for legendary Los Angeles multi-instrumentalist Thundercat. SHE SAYS: "I've seen a lot of people forgetting where they came from. I just thought...am I willing to not talk about the stuff that's happening in my community just so I don't ruffle any feathers? That to me is the price of fame - that you can't talk about what's happening just because you're on a certain pedestal."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Weoo", in which Sampa icily repeats, "Am I willing to backstab my own people for a price" over a dark clatter of percussion. Jules LE FEVRE





## NICOLE DOLLANGANGER

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Macabre millennial night-mares, softened by dream-pop tranquilisers, reverberating from a casket-shaped music box

FOR FANS OF: Lana Del Rey, Elliott Smith, the films of Harmony Korine

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Nicole Dollanganger's gothic folk songs detailing mental illness, guns, sexual violence, poverty and death are as beautiful as they are brutal. After exploring abandoned buildings growing up in Stouffville, Ontario – a small town near Toronto – the taxidermy enthusiast studied film at Ryerson University and started posting her dark, cinematic songs on Bandcamp. Sound-

bites and grisly themes from horror movies, Welcome to the Dollhouse and school shootings amplify these lo-fi bedroom recordings. Backed by acoustic guitar, Dollanganger's winsome cover of Foster the People's "Pumped Up Kicks" off 2013's Columbine EP strips away the original's party vibe to its chilling lyrical core. A demo of her latest album, Natural Born Losers, eventually reached her countrywoman Grimes. "It blew up my brain so hard that I literally started Eerie [Organization, a new artist collective] to fucking put it out," the art-pop experimenter said in a press release. They performed together opening for Lana Del Rey last June and Dollanganger supported Grimes on a recent tour.

**SHE SAYS:** "I fell in love most with aggression in vocal delivery," explains Dollanganger. "Even when someone's singing something that isn't aggressive, but they

yell it or scream it, it strikes me. Ceremony comes to mind. They're incredible. [Frontman Ross Farrar's] vocal performances, I was like, "Holy shit." Type O Negative, I was taken with how [Peter Steele] fluctuated between really dark topics and really light topics. Some of the sounds were really industrial and heavy, and some were softer. That kind of mixture is really intriguing. [Marilyn] Manson does the same thing.

"I really enjoy hitting record on Garage-Band. For an hour and a half I'll just free-style. I'll get a chord progression going and start singing. I'll record everything. Most of it's trash, but usually there's a line at least – like 'drinking a cup of alligator blood' – then I'll build around that."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: Echoing the pulse of Nine Inch Nails' "Hurt", Dollanganger sweetly toes the line of bruised love on "You're So Cool".



### AYLA

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Soaring, reach-for-the-rafters anthemic pop from a young soul with an eye on mastering her craft **FOR FANS OF:** Florence + the Machine, Sarah Blasko, Lana Del Rey, Sia

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Growing up on a farm just north of Queensland's Sunshine Coast, 20-year-old Ayla Scanlan put her first song to tape at the age of five ("I'd make up songs around the house when I was really young - mum and dad bought me a tape recorder so I could record them"). A skilled singer, guitarist and keyboard player, Ayla started playing live as a teenager via busking and school performances, going on to record two songs she wrote at 15 ("Wish I Was" and "Waiting") in 2014 with producer Elliot Heinrich, who fleshed out Ayla's acoustic songs with full instrumentation. ("We worked in a similar way on all the other tracks on the EP," she says of her debut five-tracker, When the World Ends.) "Wish I Was" became 2014's most played track by a female solo artist on Triple J, leading to extensive touring and a deal with Italian label Ego Music (Emma Louise, the Jezabels). SHE SAYS: "This year I'm looking forward to doing some more co-writing – it'll be interesting to see other people's approach to songwriting and how that can influence me. I've got one booked in with Katie Noonan, who's someone I've been inspired by for a long time. I'd also like to play more shows and festivals this year and I'd like to do another release, whether that be a new EP or an album." **HEAR FOR YOURSELF:** "When the World Ends", the opening title-track of her debut EP. JAMES JENNINGS

## HORROR MY FRIEND

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Barbed hooks and bright melodies couched in blistering noise

FOR FANS OF: Dinosaur Jr., Screamfeeder, Japandroids, Sonic Youth

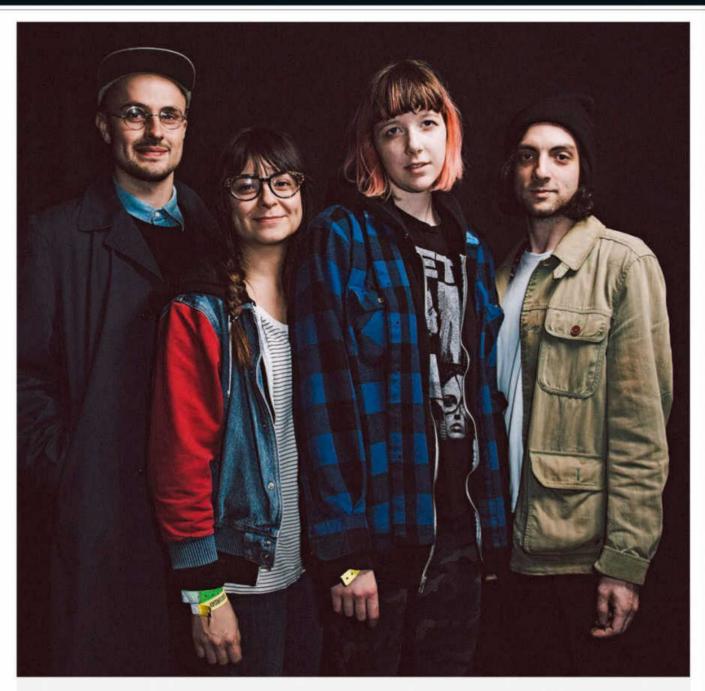
WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTEN-TION: Adelaide trio Horror My Friend take any number of cues from the Nineties, never settling on one mode for long. They alternate between jangly slacker indie rock and darker, more driving punk, then cake the songs in a mix of dreamy shoegaze textures and gnarly grunge fuzz. Playing together since they finished high school, the band have scored prized support slots for DZ Deathrays, Violent Soho, and the Cribs. Their bruising debut album, Stay In, Do Nothing, got them signed to Melbourne's trusted punk outpost, Poison City, home to similarly anthemic acts like the Smith Street Band and the Meanies. They're launching it this month with an 11-show national tour. THEY SAY: "A lot of great bands in Adelaide don't get the attention they deserve," observes co-frontman Tom Gordon, citing Sincerely, Grizzly as his favourite. "But coming up in Adelaide, it's a little easier because you have less competition. A lot of the opportunities we got starting out, I don't think we would have gotten them in Melbourne." And for every band that leaves Adelaide, there's a band like Bad//Dreems that stays and are still "absolutely killing it all around Australia". Horror My Friend could go just



Being a trio "forces you to be more creative", says Tom Gordon.

as far, judiciously employing fuzz pedals for a sound that's surprisingly huge for a threepiece. Being a trio "forces you to be more creative", reasons Gordon. "We try to fill out the sound as much as we can."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: Album opener "Death Hill" sums up the band's noise-pop catchiness, but the single "Stay In" packs even more range into less than four minutes.



## **DILLY DALLY**

**SOUNDS LIKE:** An unleashed id with a sick distortion pedal

FOR FANS OF: Nirvana, the Pixies, PJ Har-

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: The Toronto four-piece's blazing full-length debut, Sore, has earned rave reviews, and their live show turned heads at last year's CMJ festival. "It feels more natural for me to be onstage than it feels anywhere else in my life - it's like the opposite of stage fright," says singer-guitarist Katie Monks, who founded Dilly Dally with guitarist Liz Ball, her best friend from high school. "It's like an alternate life where you can speak a language that's a lot more free." Along with powerful originals like "Snake Head"

"It feels

more natural

for me to be

onstage."

and "The Touch", their recent sets have included a memorably surly cover of Drake's "Know Yourself". "Nobody here calls Toronto 'the 6' at all," Monks notes. "So there's a layer of sarcasm to the cover. But it's still a fucking

awesome song! Drake is so honest about being lame that it's endearing."

THEY SAY: Monks says her vocal cords are doing just fine, thank you, despite some concern-trolling she's encountered lately. "I resent the people who wrote about the record, like, 'Let's see how her voice holds up on tour'," she says. "I'm like, what the hell?! I've been playing shows

for six years. I just do my halfassed vocal warm-up of singing Sinead O'Connor before we go onstage, and that's it, really." HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Purple Rage" finds post-breakup liberation in a rowdy mosh pit. "This

relationship I was in fizzled out, and I was left with these negative feelings that I wasn't good enough," Monks says. "That song is me fantasising about a new life and a new Katie." SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON

## David Bowie

1947 - 2016

How rock's greatest outsider continually re-created himself, and changed the world along the way

By Mikal Gilmore

EATH HAD BEEN ON DAVID Bowie's mind in recent years. In "The Stars (Are Out Tonight)," from his surprise 2013 release, *The Next Day*, he could see it above and below: "Stars are never sleeping/Dead ones

and the living/We live closer to the Earth/Never to the heavens." Most memorably, he spoke about it in lyrics from his new album, *Blackstar*, released just two days before his end. In the spellbinding "Lazarus," Bowie sang, "Look up here, I'm in heaven/I've got scars that can't be seen/I've got drama, can't be stolen/Everybody knows me now/Look up here, man, I'm in danger/I've got nothing left to lose." It was the least fanciful verse he'd ever written.











#### ABSOLUTE BEGINNER

(1) 16-year-old David Jones, posed for a teen-mag in 1963. (2 and 3) An 18-year-old Jones in 1965. (4) Bowie performs with his band, The Buzz in 1966 (5) A pre-glam Bowie jams at a party thrown by D.J. Rodney Bingenheimer in California, 1971.

For us, though, death didn't seem to become David Bowie. At age 69, he was, to be sure, no longer a young man. For years he had been largely out of our scrutiny; once voluble in interviews, he had quit them entirely. In early 2015, he underwent chemotherapy for what was reported to be liver cancer. Some friends thought he had beat the worst part. At the time of his death, on January 10th, Bowie was already working on a follow-up to *Blackstar*.

He had been a vital presence since the world saw him standing there, outfitted as Ziggy Stardust, in a glittery and tight fishnet top, wearing a perfect swept-up shock of bright, artificial red hair, sparkling earrings and an impossibly beautiful and confident face. He was unlike anything rock & roll beheld before, and he proved its greatest liberator since Elvis Presley. Like Presley, he coalesced an audience of outsiders - young people held in disregard. Bowie gave his following the nerve to assert a sexuality that pop culture saw as marginal and abject. "We were giving permission to ourselves," Bowie wrote, "to reinvent culture the way we wanted it. With great big shoes." Sometimes Bowie seemed to recoil from what he'd done, as if it defined his image and possibilities too fast. He would spend years trying to distance

MIKAL GILMORE wrote about Freddie Mercury and Queen in July 2014. himself from it; he'd drive himself to near madness, to confusion and to new greatness along the way, always a nomad, roaming from one future to another. By the end, in the video for "Lazarus," he writhed in a sarcophagus, trying to wrestle either to or from death.

The public reaction to that death – in the hours and days that followed – was genuine and massive: There was an immediate and immense outpouring through social media; his influence on everything from fashion to underground culture was hailed in the media; the Vatican even offered a blessing. David Bowie was one of those people the world couldn't imagine living without. But since death was at his disposal, Bowie apparently decided to face it and make it an element in his work, a collaborative partner. This was what he'd always done: He transformed himself, and then moved on.

HANGEABILITY WAS, AT least early on, David Bowie's most consistent trait. He restyled his appearance and sounds, he explored new places and perspectives, and was regularly described as a chameleon. Some observers wondered if this amounted to something more than a change in image

or persona – something closer to a genuinely shifting personality or even psychology. Why so many variances? Why a space alien at one point, a sexualized prophet a couple of years later, a "plastic soul" singer a year after that?

The answer, of course, was that all of these characters were outsiders. "All I knew," Bowie once said, was that there was "this otherness, this other world, an alternative reality, one that I really want to embrace. I wanted anything but the place I came from."

He came from a place where madness threatened. His mother, Margaret Burns (known as Peggy), had three sisters who suffered from schizophrenia or other mental illness. In 1947, Burns – who already had a 10-year-old son, Terry, from an affair with a French bar porter – married Haywood Stenton Jones, a public-relations man who left his wife and daughter to be with her. The couple's only child, David Robert Jones, was born in Brixton.

Bowie's older half brother was his first influence: Terry introduced him to Nietzsche and the writings of the Beats, as well as to Eric Dolphy and Charles Mingus. But Terry also suffered from mental illness, and would eventually be diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. Bowie remembered taking Terry to see Cream at a 1966 concert in Bromley. "I had to take him out of the club because it was really starting to af-





fect him – he was swaying," Bowie recalled. "We got out into the street and he collapsed on the ground, and he said there was fire and stuff pouring out the pavement."

Bowie became concerned that his family's madness might be communicable. He started to form emotional distances

"All I knew

world I

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the place I

came from."

anything but

was this other

from his parents, who had trouble handling Terry and eventually turned him out of the house. In 1976, Bowie told *Playboy*, "My brother Terry's in an asylum right now. Everybody says, 'Oh, yes, my family is quite mad.' Mine really is. No fucking about, boy. Most of them are nutty – in, just out of, or going into an institution. Or dead."

One thing the family shared, though, was music. His mother, in particular, was a fine singer. Bowie

later said, "'All our family could sing,' she'd inform my father and me. We couldn't do much else, but we all loved music."

In 1956, Bowie first heard rock & roll, in the music of Little Richard and Elvis Presley. The music was already transforming American culture and society—it was, in a sense, about disturbance, race, sex and a new youthful power. For Bowie, this was the obsession that saved him. He

wanted, like Presley, to become somebody who could transform himself before the world, who invented his own prospects, who could stand in defiance and never be unremembered.

By 1963, British rock & roll aspirants - including the Beatles and the Rolling

Stones - were developing their own R&B-informed versions of the music: rough, insolent, inventive and overpowering. Bowie joined several R&B and mod groups, but he didn't have a band disposition; he wanted to stand apart. By the time he was 19, he'd met a manager who secured him a record contract with a subsidiary of Decca. Ken Pitt - who believed he'd found the next Frank Sinatra when he first heard Bowie sing Rodgers and Hammerstein's "You'll

Never Walk Alone" at London's Marquee Club in 1966 – let the young man share his home, as relief from the hell of the Jones household. Pitt convinced him that he could no longer use the last name Jones, after the rise of *Oliver!* child actor Davy Jones (later a member of the Monkees). The singer selected Bowie, after American knife-wielding pioneer Jim Bowie; the new last name, he decided, signified a way

of cutting deeper. Pitt also turned Bowie on to the grotesque art of Egon Schiele and Aubrey Beardsley, and the writings of 19th-century decadents such as Oscar Wilde. But the manager's most lasting gift was introducing Bowie to the music of the Velvet Underground: The group, and the songwriting of its leader, Lou Reed, showed Bowie how to write about a mean world, in terms and sounds that were both beautiful and cacophonous.

Bowie was casting about musically, singing cabaret at times, working in collectives and sometimes playing solo folk music. He was a fan of Bob Dylan, and he admired friend and rival Marc Bolan's abstruse work in Tyrannosaurus Rex, before Bolan metamorphosed into T. Rex. Bowie's debut album, *David Bowie* – released in June 1967 – displayed wide-ranging and unconventional sources: British music hall, French *chanson* and show-tune-style balladry – none of which connected with much of an audience.

Some who knew Bowie thought that his mutability in adapting new musical styles and looks carried over to his erratic treatment of others. He could be charming, attentive and enticing, but he could turn indifferent, even seemingly unfeeling. Bowie would describe himself at times as disconnected. In 1972, he told ROLLING STONE, "I'm a...very cold person. I can't feel strongly. I get so numb. I find I'm walk-



ing around numb. I'm a bit of an iceman." Bowie's inconstant aspect wasn't helped by his libertine marriage to the flamboyant, eccentric Angela Barnett; Bowie once said that being married to her was "like living with a blowtorch." As one story goes, Angela once threw herself down a staircase, thinking Bowie was going out to meet another lover; Bowie purportedly stepped over her and said, "Well, when you feel like it, and if you're not dead, call me." Producer Ken Scott told author David Buckley, "When [Angie] walked into a room, you knew it. I think David saw the effect she had on people and started to emulate it. I think it was part of him taking from everything around him and making it part of him. Because, in the early stages, he was much more quiet and subdued. And he became more flamboyant as time went on."

Bowie landed his first major hit, "Space Oddity," from the album of the same name. Timed to be released close to the first manned moon landing, in July 1969, it was an affecting reflection of a man lost in space – a representation of Bowie's own disconnection. In that same season, Bowie, Angela and some friends and band members settled into Haddon Hall, a Victorian house with Gothic windows in Kent that would become the birthplace of David Bowie's legend. It was there – amid a lot of clubgoing and promiscuity – that Bowie developed the songs and

ideas that would turn into his next three, breakthrough albums (*The Man Who Sold the World, Hunky Dory* and *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars*).

The first salvo, 1970's *The Man Who* Sold the World, was a strange, paranoid

and philosophical album. Bowie was now working largely in electric rock & roll - hard and dissonant, and not quite like anybody else's. He was also playing with musicians who could carry out his increasing sense of risk: bassist Tony Visconti (who would become Bowie's longtime friend and producer), drummer Woody Woodmansey and, in particular, guitarist Mick Ronson, who gave Bowie's songs a crucial majesty. "You believed every note had been wrenched from his soul," Bowie once said.

Hunky Dory, from 1971, is one of rock's perfect works. On the mellifluent opening track, "Changes," he stood up for the audience he wanted and identified with: "And these children that you spit on/As they try to change their worlds/Are immune to your consultations/They're quite aware what they're going through." His new pop skills first became evident in "Oh! You

Pretty Things," a hit single he'd written for Peter Noone, formerly the lead singer in Herman's Hermits. Noone would call Bowie the best songwriter since the team of John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Yet behind the sweetness of "Oh! You Pretty Things," there was also a complex mind at

work, willing to turn dark: "I look out my window, what do I see?/A crack in the sky and a hand reaching down to me/All the nightmares came today/And it looks as though they're here to stay."

Hunky Dory was also unexpectedly seedy at moments: particularly "Queen Bitch" (a tribute to the Velvet Underground's Reed), about a man who is desirous, mistrustful, finally raging, over another man's sexual attentions. When Bowie performed the song on U.K.

television in 1972, the moment made him. Nobody had seen anybody like this before: an utterly confident young man, facing the camera in a commando suit and tall red boots, singing unashamedly about proscribed matters and people in degraded conditions in both their lives and the culture around them.

By this time, Bowie had invented a famous and outrageous character who

## SETTY IMAGES, 3



#### STARMAN

(1) In the Netherlands, with then-wife Angela and son Duncan Jones, 1974. (2) With Mick Ronson, 1973. (3) Bowie said Ziggy Stardust was a fiction, but that "I play it right down the line." (4) At the Grammys with friends John Lennon and Yoko Ono. 1975.





would define him: Ziggy Stardust, an otherworldly messiah who fell to Earth therefore to corruption - and who lost everything but a legacy. Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars (1972) was Bowie's breakthrough, and a complicated one. Not unlike the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, the album and its title formed an alter ego for a creative mind. In the Beatles' case, though, they were already famous and their second self was clearly a stand-in or fiction. In Ziggy's case, the alter ego seemed to define the creative mind - Bowie - rather than the other way around. That's because an audience hadn't really known Bowie before. This is how he made his imprint: as a vain and charismatic being, suddenly making the best music on the planet and attracting an audience that became a following, and who recognized a liberator when it saw one.

the Spiders From Mars"
was a dividing line for
popular music, as surely as punk or disco would
prove in a few years. "I was incredibly excited by it at the time," Bowie later said. "It

just felt so radical - completely against ev-

erything that was happening at the time

with the denims and the whole laid-back atmosphere."

Musically, Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars was often exuberant, with undertones that were even darker than Hunky Dory's. The new album opened with "Five Years," about the immediate reaction people have when they learn the Earth's days are numbered: "Five years, that's all we've got." The revelation brings out the worst and the best: "A girl my age went off her head, hit some tiny children/If the black hadn't a-pulled her off, I think she would have killed them.../A cop knelt and kissed the feet of a priest/And a queer threw up at the sight of that." It is among Bowie's most remarkable songs: Everybody, it says, is equal and bewildered and precious standing before the knowledge of death. At the album's end, Bowie sang the equally enthralling "Rock & Roll Suicide," from the view of a man trying to save a person who is confused, hurting and in peril of selfdestruction. But if we've been following the album's loose story, it's implicit that the person singing, trying to rescue another, doesn't have long to live himself.

Perhaps most important, Ziggy Stardust, even more than Hunky Dory, delineated sexual themes – bisexuality and homosexuality among them – that popular culture hadn't depicted on this scale before. Bowie's outrageous appearance alone

was enough to do the job, but he took it much further than that, miming oral sex on Ronson's guitar at shows. It was the sort of image of libido that had never been allowed before in the public arena.

He claimed he intended Ziggy Stardust as a fictional character, "but I play that character right down the line." Ziggy Stardust was assumed by many – especially fans – to represent David Bowie's true values and lifestyle. Bowie knew this. "It's very hard to convince people that you can be quite different offstage in rock & roll than you are onstage. One of the principles in rock is that it's the person himself expressing what he really and truly feels."

In an eventful 1972 Melody Maker interview, Bowie spontaneously announced, "I'm gay - and always have been, even when I was David Jones." He didn't appear to be exclusively gay; after all, he was married to a woman, now with a child - Angela had given birth to Duncan Jones, born Zowie Bowie, in 1971 - and was purported to have had sex with many women. In 1983, he would tell Kurt Loder, in ROLL-ING STONE, that claiming to be bisexual "was the biggest mistake I ever made." Later, he clarified: "I think I was always a closet heterosexual. I didn't ever feel that I was a real bisexual. It was like I was making all the moves, down to the situation of actually trying it out with some guys. But for me, I was more magnetized by the whole gay scene, which was underground. Remember, in the early 1970s it was still virtually taboo. There might have been free love, but it was heterosexual love. I like this twilight world. I like the idea of these clubs and these people and everything about it being something that nobody knew anything about. So it attracted me like crazy."

Critic John Gill and others thought that Bowie had used and betrayed gay culture, but also admitted that he had emboldened many people to be more open about their sexuality. Singer Tom Robinson said, "For gay musicians, Bowie was seismic. To hell with whether he disowned us later."

Bowie said later, "I couldn't decide whether I was writing the characters or whether the characters were writing me, or whether we were all one and the same." He toured with the Spiders From Mars bassist Trevor Bolder, drummer Woodmansey and guitarist Ronson - in the U.K. and America for much of 1972 and 1973. Then, on July 3rd, 1973, at a show at London's Hammersmith Odeon, Bowie did away with Ziggy Stardust in one sure and shocking move. Before the evening's final song, "Rock & Roll Suicide," Bowie spoke to his audience. "Not only is this the last show of the tour," he said, "but it is the last show we'll ever do. Thank you. Bye-bye. We love you."

The crowd erupted in a shriek. Bowie's band was just as surprised. Nobody knew that he had planned this. "I really did want it all to come to an end," Bowie wrote in his memoir, *Moonage Daydream*. "I was now writing for a different kind of project and exhausted and completely bored with the whole Ziggy concept...couldn't keep my attention on the performance. I was wasted and miserable."

Bowie never worked again with the Spiders From Mars - perhaps the best band in the world at the moment. He no longer wanted musicians with a reputation as good as his own, or who shared his identity. "I honestly can't remember Mick that well nowadays," he said in 1976 of Ronson. "It's a long time ago. He's just like any other band member." Ronson went on to play with Ian Hunter and in Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue. He and Bowie later reconciled, and Bowie was more forthcoming with his respect: "Mick was the perfect foil for the Ziggy character," he said. "He was very much a salt-ofthe-earth type, the blunt northerner with a defiantly masculine personality, so that what you got was the old-fashioned yin and yang thing. As a rock duo, I thought we were every bit as good as Mick and Keith....Ziggy and Mick were the personification of that rock & roll dualism." The guitarist died of liver cancer in April 1993.

Bowie fully intended to leave Ziggy Stardust behind at the Odeon that night.

He did something at the end of that concert, though, that made the likelihood impossible, in that performance of "Rock & Roll Suicide." Bowie wasn't just addressing a single soul in this instance, but he was also - crucially - talking to his audience, and to every marginalized person in that crowd: "You're not alone...," he sang with empathy that felt real; it was a trait he might have learned from one of his heroes, Judy Garland: "Gimme your hands 'cause you're wonderful." Bowie didn't realize that this assurance, real or fictional, was the most important thing he ever did. He had provided a model of courage to the Ziggy audiences - and in turn, over the years that followed, to millions of others - who had never been embraced by a popular-culture hero before. He helped set others free in unexpected ways. He promised to be there for them. He could never annul that moment.

N THE SEASONS THAT IMMEDIately followed, Bowie found himself in a quandary: He still emitted the Ziggy Stardust vibe – so did his growing audience. He hadn't yet redefined himself in any clear way, and he never broke his pace of work-

ing and touring – it only intensified, though fueled increasingly by drug use.

In Aladdin Sane (1973), the album's eponymous lead character was an extension of Ziggy Stardust - though a more disconnected observer of others' excesses and creeping ruin. Bowie had thought of the album as an interim effort (he had theatrical hopes for the one that would follow) but later changed his mind: "Funnily enough, in retrospect, for me, it's the more successful album, because it's more informed about rock & roll than Ziggy was."

The next album, 1974's Diamond Dogs, was more foreboding: It began with howls, and though there were beautiful ("Rock & Roll With Me") and insolent moments ("Rebel Rebel"), Bowie's soundscape was strewn with waste, bad faith and intimations of death; he was talking about a world that might not survive and might not deserve to. Yet even if the song structures on Aladdin Sane and Diamond Dogs had grown more complex, the man making the music still resembled Ziggy Stardust. His audience of outsiders knew what it wanted from Bowie - more of the same, in sounds and looks, and he was giving it to them.

Bowie put together an evolving touring ensemble for North America that included, at various times, guitarists Earl Slick and Carlos Alomar, saxophonist David Sanborn, bassist Willie Weeks, drummer Tony Newman and pianist Mike Garson. (Garson brought a new stretch to Bowie's music. Garson's complex, atonal solo in "Aladdin Sane" remains the single best instrumental break in all of Bowie's music.) Bowie, though, wasn't happy with what was developing.

Bowie resolved to make a soul – or as he termed it, "plastic soul," album. He appreciated the funk and R&B of the time, and in America he could expose himself to it. This time he decisively changed his look, fashioning his hair up into a suave pompadour. The album that resulted, 1975's Young Americans, proved to be Bowie's breakthrough in the U.S. – in part because of the taut and unusual "Fame" that he wrote and recorded with his friend John Lennon.

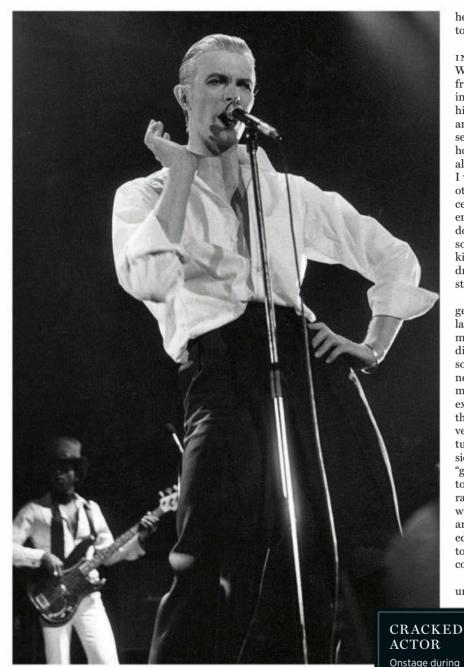
Young Americans wasn't purely an emulation of black pop. Some songs, such as a cover of the Beatles' "Across the Universe," didn't fit the purported scheme at all—and that diversity made the album stronger and more singular. In the end, though, the album didn't solve anything for Bowie. "Young Americans was damn depress-

ing," he said. Bowie had developed a horrific cocaine habit. "It was a terribly traumatic time. I was in a terrible state. I was absolutely infuriated that I was still in rock & roll. And not only in it, but had been sucked right into the center of it."

Bowie later implied he was driving himself crazy. In 1993, he told England's Radio 1, "One puts oneself through such psychological damage in trying to avoid the threat of insanity. You start to approach the very thing that you're scared of." He moved to Los Angeles, lived with little sleep on a

diet of cocaine, milk, and red and green peppers. He investigated the occult, and according to one rumor, stored his urine in a refrigerator so no wizard could harm him with his own bodily fluids. In a 1976 ROLLING STONE profile, Cameron Crowe related an incident during an interview: "Suddenly - always suddenly - David is on his feet and rushing to a nearby picture window. He thinks he's seen a body fall from the sky. 'I've got to do this,' he says, pulling a shade down on the window. A ballpoint-penned star has been crudely drawn on the inside. Below it is the word 'Aum.' Bowie lights a black candle on his dresser and immediately blows it out to

"I couldn't decide whether I was writing the characters, or if they were writing me, or whether we were all the same."



leave a thin trail of smoke floating upward. 'Don't let me scare the pants off you. It's only protective. I've been getting a little trouble from...the neighbors.'"

"David was never insane," Angela later wrote. "The really crazy stuff...coincided precisely with his ingestion of enormous amounts of [drugs]. His madness simply didn't happen unless he was stoned out of his mind."

Perhaps as proof that he hadn't lost it, Bowie's magnificent 1976 album, *Station to Station*, took his soul and funk interests into new directions, incorporating both art-rock structures (the title song) and some of the artist's most beautiful ballad vocals ("Word on a Wing," "Stay" and a cover of Dimitri Tiomkin's "Wild Is the

Wind," originally recorded by Johnny Mathis in 1957). It ended up being recognized as one of Bowie's freshest and fin-

est works. "The only way to remain a vibrant part of what is happening," he said, "is to keep working anew all the time. For me, it always will be change. I can't envisage any period of creative stability and resting on any laurels. I think for what I do and what I'm known for, it would be disastrous."

the Station to

Wembley Arena,

London, May 1976

Station tour,

At the same time, little by little, something changed for the better in Bowie's personal life – at least in a short run. "It was time to get out of this terrible lifestyle I'd put myself into and get healthy,"

he later said. "It was time to pull myself together."

IN LATE 1976, BOWIE RELOCATED TO West Berlin, where he caroused with his friend Iggy Pop, of the Stooges. Bowie was intent on putting his drug habits behind him, but ended up just trading them in and became a heavy drinker. His efforts at self-imposed rehabilitation hadn't taken hold. "I was in a serious decline, emotionally and socially," he said in 1996. "I think I was very much on course to be just another rock casualty - in fact, I'm quite certain I wouldn't have survived the Seventies if I'd carried on doing what I was doing. But I was lucky enough to know somewhere within me that I really was killing myself, and I had to do something drastic to pull myself out of that. I had to stop, which I did."

In 1977, Bowie divorced the erratic Angela, winning custody of Duncan, who largely avoided communication with his mother in the years after. Bowie also vindicated himself in other ways and found some relief from his excesses by making new groundbreaking music. With former Roxy Music keyboardist and music experimentalist Brian Eno, Bowie took the abject state that he'd been in and converted it into new, shattered art-rock textures, writing fragmentary and impressionistic lyrics that fit the new forms. Eno "got me off narration, which I was so intolerably bored with," said Bowie. "Narrating stories, or doing little vignettes of what I thought was happening in America and putting it on my albums in convoluted fashion...Brian really opened my eyes to the idea of processing, to the abstract of communication."

The resulting album, 1977's *Low*, was unconventional pop by any standard: En-

tire tracks consisted of odd instrumental fragments; others – "Breaking Glass," "Speed of Life" and "Sound and Vision" – lastingly redefined modern artsong; and the extraordinarily beautiful "Warszawa" invented a new language (Visconti described it as "quasi-Balkan") to contain its hypnotic mysteries. When Bowie sang on Low, it

was often in a horizontal, undisturbed voice, as if from a dissociated place.

At first his label, RCA, did not want to release *Low*. "I remember getting angry about RCA's reaction," Bowie said. "I went into incredible anger first and then depression for months. I mean, it was really awful, the treatment they gave to that album. It was hideous, because I knew how wrong they were about it." The subsequent collaboration with Eno, *Heroes*, produced one of Bowie's most popular anthems in its title song, about lovers meet-



ing under the threat of the Berlin Wall. Low and Heroes went on to inspire a generation – or more – of new artists, from Joy Division, Cabaret Voltaire, the Human League and Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark to Trent Reznor, and proved to be Bowie's most sonically influential work.

THE MAKING OF THE MUSIC AND THE time in Berlin itself helped Bowie's health and psychology. Bowie and Eno wound down their collaboration with 1979's Lodger - a less-experimental effort that in some instances ("D.J.," "Look Back in Anger" and "Boys Keep Swinging") returned to the pop forms that Bowie had eschewed. In 1980, Bowie returned to New York, where he recorded what was generally considered to be his last great work for more than a decade, Scary Monsters. In some ways, it was a summation of what Bowie had done since the early 1970s: music that recalled both the boldness of the Ziggy period and the Berlin avant-garde albums. Scary Monsters yielded "Ashes to Ashes," an evocation of "Space Oddity" that met and surpassed

In September 1980, Bowie took a threemonth role on Broadway, playing John Merrick, the title character in *The Ele*- phant Man. It was a physically tiring role, and Bowie received praising reviews. On the night of December 8th, he received news that his friend John Lennon had been shot to death in front of the Dakota apartment building in Manhattan. It was reported that Lennon's killer, Mark David Chapman, had attended a performance of *The Elephant Man* just days before the killing, and had Bowie on a list of potential targets. Bowie soon left the role.

IN 1983, AFTER A THREE-YEAR ABsence from recording popular music, Bowie moved to a new label, EMI - reportedly for \$17 million - and made the biggest album of his career, Let's Dance, produced by Nile Rodgers of Chic. Bowie had remade himself once again: He was a global superstar now, on the same plane as Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna and Bruce Springsteen (whom Bowie had championed years before). His image and movements were elegant, the music was an enjoyable foray into huge, synth-powered R&B, Stan Kenton-inspired big-band swing and suggestions of 1950s pop. But Bowie now had to face new questions: When you lose your excesses, do you also lose your brilliance? What does it mean for an artist to forswear the cutting edge for mere success, even if it is immense? "I don't really have the urge to continue as a songwriter and performer in terms of experimentation – at this moment," Bowie told *NME*. "I feel that at the moment I'm of an age – and age has an awful lot to do with it – I'm just starting to enjoy growing up. I'm enjoying being my age, 36, and what comes with it."

Around this time, Bowie mentioned his half brother, Terry, during an interview. "It is my fault we grew apart," he said, "and it is painful." On January 16th, 1985, Terry left a psychiatric hospital, walked to a nearby train station and laid his head on the tracks. Bowie sent roses to his brother's funeral and a card that read, "You've seen more things than we can imagine, but all these moments will be lost, like tears washed away by the rain. God bless you - David." Bowie later said he was "never quite sure of what real position Terry had in my life, whether Terry was a real person or whether I was actually referring to another part of me. I wonder if I imbued my stepbrother with more attributes than he really had."

After *Let's Dance*, Bowie wandered a confusing creative trail, making two indifferent-sounding albums – *Tonight* (1984), *Never Let Me Down* (1987) – that met with

little esteem. In 1984, Bowie said, "I think because I was starting to feel sure of myself in terms of my life, my state of health and my being...I wanted to put my musical being in a similar staid and healthy area. But I'm not sure that that was a very wise thing to do."

He was right: He had become a successful mainstream artist. He had wealth, homes, legend, and if the albums didn't succeed, he could mount profitable stadium-size tours. "The main problem with success," Brian Eno said of Bowie, "is that it has a huge momentum. It's like you've got this big train behind you, and it wants you to carry on going the same way. Nobody wants you to step off the tracks."

Eventually, Bowie was ready to step off. As he had once wanted to abandon Ziggy Stardust, he now wanted to relinquish his superstar standing. In 1989, he formed a supposedly democratic quartet, Tin Machine, with guitarist Reeves Gabrels, bassist Tony Sales and drummer Hunt Sales. It started with a promising idea. "We realized when we first talked," Gabrels later said, "that we were both listening to the same thing - John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Cream, the Pixies, Hendrix, Glen Branca, Sonic Youth, Strauss, Stravinsky. These were all things we wanted this band to be." In the end, it was a metallic band, blaring with feedback, and its sheer force leveled both the concept and the music the band played. "The consensus," Bowie said, "was that...it was a huge hype, because I was saying I was 'part of the band.'" At the same time, Tin Machine provided Bowie a respite from his mainstream persona and may have even helped him regain a gradual new ambition - one that, by his life's end, found him at an almost unparalleled artistic pinnacle.

HERE WAS AN EVEN MORE important source of renewal when he met Somali fashion model Iman Abdulmajid in 1990. (According to one story, Bowie saw a picture of her in a magazine and said, "I want to have a date with her.") "I'd never been out with a model before," he said, "so I hadn't even bargained on the cliché of the rock star and the model as being part of my life. So I was well surprised to meet one who was devastatingly wonderful and not the usual sort of bubblehead that I'd met in the past. I make no bones about it. I was naming the children the night we met." Bowie said that their romance "was conducted in a very gentlemanly fashion, I hope, for quite some time. Lots of being led to doorways and polite kisses on the cheek. Flowers and chocolates and the whole thing. I knew it was precious from

the first night, and I just didn't want anything to spoil it."

Bowie proposed to Iman in Paris, and the couple married in secret in Lausanne, Switzerland, in April 1992. "I had to learn how to evaluate what sharing one's life meant," Bowie later said. "Strange new things like learning to listen, knowing when a reply was not necessary but just being a receptive human being.... Most importantly, though, turning one's asocial, possessive and inevitably destructive characteristics around."

Bowie wrote and recorded a new work in 1993, *Black Tie White Noise* – his first solo effort in six years – in part to commemorate the wedding. Both the album and the marriage proved turning points for him. The album (like *Let's Dance*) still had one foot in an overtly commercial sound, but it also looked at the real world and real pain with new understanding. The title song was Bowie's response to the 1992 L.A. riots that erupted after the acquittal of police officers in the beating

of Rodney King ("I'm lookin' through African eyes/Lit by the glare of an L.A. fire/I've got a face, not just my race"). In another track, "Jump They Say," Bowie addressed the suicide of his half brother, Terry.

Black Tie White Noise loosened Bowie up. He went on to record a series of ambitious, occasionally brilliant, albums -Outside (1995), The Buddha of Suburbia (1995), Earthling (1997), 'Hours' (1999), Heathen (2002), Reality (2003) - that were always musically bold and that sometimes examined vulnerable psychology, an elusive spirituality and a world in trouble. "If you can make the spiritual con-

nection with some kind of clarity, then everything else would fall into place," Bowie told journalist and author Paul Du Noyer in 2003. "A morality would seem to be offered, a plan would seem to be offered, some sense would be there. But it evades me. Yet I can't help writing about it."

Heathen was one of the most successful of the sequence – an album that was about the rising anxiety of the times, but which also had a pop and rock & roll sure-handedness that matched the dexterity of Bowie's early-Seventies music. There was both devastation and pop to be had here, and like much of Bowie's best music, each had the effect of deepening the other. Also, his new fatherhood – he and Iman's daughter,

Alexandria, was born in 2000 – was affecting his thoughts. "Since my daughter's been born, I am changing as a writer," he said. "There has been a shift in the weight of my responsibilities, relinquishing my own concerns about myself and Iman as a couple, and instead thinking about Lexi and what her world is going to be like." On another occasion, Bowie said, "I desperately want to live forever. You know what I want [is] to still be around in another 40 or 50 years....I just want to be there for Alexandria. She's so exciting and lovely, so I want to be around when she grows up."

In 2004, he suffered a heart attack on a European tour, collapsing after a show in Germany. He never toured again, though he performed in New York with Arcade Fire in 2005; with Pink Floyd's David Gilmour in London in 2006; and with Alicia Keys at a Manhattan charity concert that year. When he was seen on New York's streets in the spring of 2005, he looked recuperated and fit. The year before, Bowie had said he was preparing for a

new record. "I'm heading for another period of experimentation. [I'm at] a time when I'm collecting myself before I break all my own rules." That following album, The Next Day, wouldn't arrive until 2013, though it was worth the wait. It was a work of beauty and craft - like *Heathen*, an encapsulation of Bowie's prime early strengths. However, the long-awaited masterpiece, Blackstar, didn't come until January 8th, 2016 - David Bowie's 69th birthday. It took hold like nothing since Low or Heroes.

Two days later, he was dead. "I really don't have too many regrets," Bowie said in 2003. "I have personal regrets about my-

self and my own behavior and people I let down considerably during those years. But that's how life was for me."

In his last decade, Bowie lived a private life in downtown Manhattan and his home in Woodstock, New York, with his wife and daughter. He made music from time to time, but he gave no interviews. In his final months, as he fought to restore his health with cancer treatment, he also strived to live as creatively as ever – and he did so, in unexpected and resounding ways. Blackstar walks us right up to death, about as far as we can go without somebody holding our hand. We don't know what happens past that point, short of the rumored miraculous.



MODERN LOVE
In 2002, with Iman: "I had
to learn what sharing one's
life meant," he said after
they were married in 1992.

## The Final Years

### How Bowie stepped away - and came roaring back

By Brian Hiatt



HEN THE PAIN HIT, DAVID BOWIE WAS singing a song called "Reality". It was just another concert on a tour that had stretched on a little too long, bringing him to a stiflingly hot arena stage in Prague, on a late-June evening in 2004. "Reality", the title track to his album of the previous year, was

about facing mortality and putting illusions aside, and at age 57, he had been busy doing just that. He was sober, and had finally quit smoking. He was taking medication to lower his cholesterol, working out with a trainer. That night, as usual, he looked agelessly, extraterrestrially great: lean, with longish blond hair spilling onto his

unlined forehead, a fluorescent scarf around his neck. But as he stood in the spotlight, yowling lines like "Now my death is more than just a sad song" – a reference to his doomy Ziggy-era renditions of Jacques Brel's "My Death" – he found himself struggling for breath. Bowie clutched at his shoulder and chest, leaving the song's final words unsung.

"He looked over his shoulder at me," recalls bassist Gail Ann Dorsey, "and he was pale, translucent almost. His shirt was drenched. And he was just standing there, not singing. I could see the audience's expressions in the front row change – from joy to kind of looking concerned." A bodyguard rushed onstage and helped Bowie off.

He somehow managed to return for a few more songs that night, before seeing a doctor who misdiagnosed him with a pinched nerve in his shoulder, prescribing muscle relaxants. Bowie pushed through one more shaky show at a German festival two days later, ending with the last version of "Ziggy Stardust" he'd ever sing in concert. He hit every note, made it down the stairs leading off the stage, and promptly collapsed. At a local hospital, doctors realised that he had a blocked artery in his heart, and performed emergency surgery.

That night essentially marked the end of David Bowie as a public figure. He never toured again, never gave another in-depth interview. He grew so secretive that he chided one of his closest collaborators, Tony Visconti, for revealing that they watched British comedy during studio

breaks. By the time he made his surprise re-emergence in 2013 with his first album in a decade, *The Next Day,* he had pulled off a feat that no other rock star has quite managed, regaining all of the heady mystique of his breakthrough years, and then some. He was a legend, a living ghost, hiding in plain sight, walking his daughter to school, taking cabs, exercising alongside ordinary humans in workaday gyms in Manhattan and upstate in Woodstock.

With his family, he said, he was David Jones, the person he had been before he assumed his stage name. He had, at last, truly fallen to Earth, and he liked what he found there.

His final three years, though, were an extraordinarily fertile period of creativity. In 2014, he began work on another, even better, album, *Blackstar*, while also helping bring to life an ambitious off-Broadway show, *Lazarus*, based around his old and new songs. But he had kept one more secret: Bowie main-

tained focus on these last

creations while battling cancer (of the liver, according to one friend). He died on January 10th, two days after the release of *Blackstar*, and a month after the opening of *Lazarus*. His passing occasioned the kind of worldwide grief not seen since the deaths of Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson.

Visconti, who knew of Bowie's illness, noticed the tone of some of the *Blackstar* lyrics early on. "You canny bastard," Visconti told him. "You're writing a farewell album." Bowie simply laughed. "It's so inspirational how he lived his last year," says Visconti, pointing out that Bowie wrote some of his most amusing lyrics ("Man, she punched me like a dude", "Where the fuck did Monday go?") while terribly ill. "He kept his sense of humour."

In the worst moments, Visconti would try to reassure him. "Sometimes he would phone me when he just finished treatment," he recalls. "He couldn't talk very loud. He was really pretty messed up, and I would say, 'Don't worry about it. You're going to live.'"

"One hopes," Bowie would shoot back.
"Don't get too excited about that."

THE LAST WEEKS OF THE "REALITY" tour had been dark ones. Seven weeks before Bowie's heart attack, a stagehand suffered a fatal fall from a lighting rig; weeks later, a fan threw a lollipop at the stage, hitting Bowie in his already dam-

aged left eye - an incident he found deeply unsettling. Even before his health issues ended the tour, Bowie told his longtime keyboardist, Mike Garson (the man behind the bonkers "Aladdin Sane" piano solo), that he planned to step back to spend more time with his family: his wife, the supermodel Iman, and daughter Alexandria, born in 2000. (Bowie had raised his other child, Duncan Jones, born in 1971 and now a successful film director, amid the tours, albums, debauchery and persona-switching of the Seventies.) Bowie

adored Iman: Touring Japan with his short-lived band Tin Machine in 1992, the year they married, Bowie got what his bandmate Tony Sales describes as "a tattoo of Iman riding on a dolphin on his calf with the serenity prayer underneath it. It was based on a drawing he made." (Bowie had also begun attending

"You canny bastard," longtime producer Tony Visconti told Bowie. "You're writing a farewell album."



alcohol-abuse recovery meetings with Sales around then.)

"Three-quarters through the *Reality* tour," recalls Garson, "he said, 'You know, Mike, after this tour, I'm just going to be a father and live a normal life. And I'm going to be there for Lexi while she grows up. I missed it the first time."

Before the tour, Bowie had told Visconti, his friend and frequent producer, of ambitious plans to follow 2003's *Reality*. "We had plans to make three more albums, at least," says Visconti, who had just renewed his creative partnership with Bowie, beginning with 2002's *Heathen*. "We were talking about an electronica album, for instance. And he'd make up a group name. He wanted to have more fun and not have the pressure of releasing another David Bowie album for a

while. He said, 'When I get off tour, we'll do that.'"

The two men were renting a studio in Philip Glass' New York complex, and Visconti kept it going for a couple of years after Bowie's heart attack. Eventually, though, Bowie told him, "I'm going to give up my share. I don't think I'm going to be using it for a while. I'm gonna take some time off." He meant it: Bowie wouldn't begin work on *The Next Day* until 2010.

In 2005, Bowie briefly re-emerged, playing two short sets over a single week with what was then his favourite new band, Arcade Fire. "I feel great," he told a reporter during rehearsals. But he would perform only two more times, both in the following year. In May 2006, he paid tribute to a formative influence, Syd Barrett, by joining David Gilmour onstage in

London for the Barrett-penned "Arnold Layne" (and, for good measure, "Comfortably Numb"). Six months later, Bowie delivered a three-song performance at a charity gala, backed by Garson, closing his set by dueting with Alicia Keys on "Changes". It was the last song he ever sang onstage.

Also in 06, he joined another young band he admired, Brooklyn's TV on the Radio, in the studio, singing harmonies on their song "Province". His persistent advice to that adventurous group was, according to band member Dave Sitek, "Don't bend. Stay strange."

Around that time, Bowie told a reporter who approached him at a party that he was "fed up" with the music industry. "I go for a walk every morning," he said, "and I watch a ton of movies. One day, I watched three Woody Allen movies in a row. I like going out to [downtown movie theatre] the Angelika: If the first one's only OK, I'll sneak into one after the other. It's so easy." In another brief interview, he said, "I love seeing new theatre, I love seeing new bands, art shows, everything. I get everywhere – very quietly and never above 14th

Street." He told a friend that an ingenious trick rendered him invisible in Manhattan: He'd carry a Greek-language newspaper around, aiming to convince any curious onlookers that he was a Greek guy who happened to resemble David Bowie. When he wasn't surreptitiously taking in culture or hanging out with his family in his modern-art-filled apartment, he was making vi-

sual art of his own: painting, sketching with charcoal.

Bowie, Iman and Lexi split their time between the city and Woodstock. He had fallen in love with the "spirituality" of the Catskill Mountains while recording an album at Visconti's studio there, and ended up purchasing a 64-acre plot of land, intending to build a house. In the meantime, he'd rent a local bed-andbreakfast over the summers, and eventually bought another house nearby, renovating it to add a huge library, according to local lore. "I love mountains," he said in 2003. "I'm a Capricorn. I was born to be gallivanting on a peak somewhere.... I was never a Woodstock-y kind of person, at all, ever. But when I got up there, I flipped at how beautiful it is. There's a barrenness and sturdiness in the rugged terrain that draws me."

In 2007, Bowie helped curate New York's Highline Music Festival, which announced that he would play a "large outdoor concert" as part of the event. When he quietly pulled out, rumours swirled that he was experiencing renewed health problems. But Visconti, for one, says he saw no evidence of that.

"When I met up with David in 2008 or 2009," he says, "he actually had some weight on him. He was robust. His cheeks were rosy red. He wasn't sick. He was on medicine for his heart. But it was normal, like a lot of people in their fifties or sixties are on heart medication, and live very long lives. So he was coping with it very, very well."

Bowie was never a recluse, either. He accompanied Iman to society events, becoming a cheerful, nattily dressed but silent red-carpet presence. He popped up at the 2009 premiere of Duncan Jones' sci-fi film Moon, standing proudly alongside his son for photos. He made quirky choices for extramusical exploits, including an uproarious 2006 appearance on Ricky Gervais' Extras, a voiceover for Lexi's favourite cartoon, Sponge-Bob SquarePants, and roles in Christopher Nolan's The Prestige (as inventor Nikola Tesla), in 2006, and in the 2008 indie film August (as a fearsome corporate executive). Though Nolan had to implore him to take the former role, Bowie actually sought out the latter he had a movie agent actively reading scripts for him. But his offer to act in August came with unusual preconditions. "He would show up, he'd know his lines, he'd do the role," recalls the film's director, Austin Chick, "But under no circumstances was I allowed to direct him." Chick more or less agreed, but Bowie ended up accepting some direction anyway for the tiny part.

y January 2013, Bowie had lulled the world into thinking he had long since retired from music. So when he celebrated his 66th birthday with the out-of-nowhere announcement of his first album in a decade, *The Next Day*, the response was close to ecstatic. "People were so delighted." says

Next Day, the response was close to ecstatic. "People were so delighted," says U2's Bono, who traded e-mails with Bowie around that time, "and he was so delighted that there was so much interest in it." For once, Bowie joked to Bono, he wasn't overshadowed on his birthday by Elvis Presley, also born on January 8th.

The project began with a casual question to Visconti: "How would you like to make some demos?" Bowie wrote 30 or so songs for the album, in wildly different styles, recording at Soho's Magic Shop studio, around the corner from his apartment building. They'd lay down the basic tracks live, with Bowie even playing some guitar.

It was the beginning of what turned into a final flood of productivity. "I can't stop it," he wrote in an e-mail to Floria Sigismondi, who directed clever music videos for two *Next Day* tracks. "It's com-

ing full force and I'm just creating and creating and creating."

In March 2013, Bowie visited London, where he brought Iman and Lexi along for an off-hours visit to "David Bowie Is", a well-received, career-spanning exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum that included everything from his sketches for stage setups to famous costumes to an old coke spoon, all drawn from the Bowie organisation's own extensive, carefully maintained, 75,000-item archives. "We arranged it as a private, self-led family visit," says exhibit co-curator Victoria Broackes. "They spent a good amount of time there. I think to see it all on show must have been a very unusual experience for him, and quite overwhelming, in a sense."

During that same London trip, Bowie told an old friend, theatre producer Rob-

"I can't stop

told a friend

final burst of

productivity.

creating and

creating and

it." Bowie

during his

"I'm just

creating."

ert Fox, that he was thinking about a musical based on the 1963 book The Man Who Fell to Earth - he had starred in a movie adaptation of it in 1976, and had long been haunted by (and identified with) its main character, stranded alien Thomas Newton: Even the eerie instrumentals on 1977's Low were in part an attempt to capture Newton's mentality. Fox hooked Bowie up with Irish playwright Enda Walsh, who wrote the book for the Tony Award-winning adaptation of Once. First draft in hand, they recruited avant-garde

theatre director Ivo van Hove around April 2014. Van Hove was a Bowie fanatic, but he had scheduling issues. "I felt with David, from day one, a huge urgency to do it," van Hove says. "I wanted to postpone it, and he said, 'No, no, we have to make it now, it has to happen."

By November that year, they were workshopping the show, known as *Lazarus*. In the show, an older Newton was isolated in his apartment, guzzling gin, heartbroken, calling himself "a dying man who can't die". His only salvation comes in the apparition of a 13-year-old girl who helps him believe that he might somehow find a way to some version of home. The little girl revives the jaded, alienated Newton, playing Jesus to his Lazarus. Van Hove acknowledges that "of course it's not a coincidence" that the character is the same age as Bowie's daughter was when he wrote it.

As they cast the show, Bowie had the novel experience of hearing his songs sung back to him. When he heard costar Cristin Milioti, of *How I Met Your Mother* and *Fargo*, perform a dark, anguished version of "Changes", he smiled.

"I'm so glad I wrote that song," he said. As a teenager, Bowie had imagined writing musicals, and he took particular pleasure in seeing *Lazarus* take shape. "What I always saw in him was the face of a delighted and amazed child," says James Nicola, artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop, which produced the show, "who was seeing something come to life that was unexpected and joyful".

Bowie was also writing new songs – some of them destined for *Lazarus*, some for his next album, some for both. In the summer of 2014, Bowie and Visconti had recorded a single song, "Sue (Or in a Season of Crime)", with the Maria Schneider Orchestra, which he released on the greatest-hits comp *Nothing Has Changed*. It was a jazzy, orchestral epic unlike anything he'd recorded before, and among the featured musicians was jazz

saxophonist Donny Mc-Caslin, whose eclectic, jazzschooled band would form the musical core of Bowie's next album.

When Bowie showed up for *Blackstar* recording sessions in New York last January, he had no eyebrows, and no hair on his head. He had begun to tell a handful of friends and collaborators that he had cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy. "He just came fresh from a chemo session," says Visconti. "And there was no way he could keep it a secret from the band. He told me privately, and I really got

choked up when we sat face to face talking about it." Bowie informed the band members that he was ill and asked them to keep it a secret. It was never discussed again.

"He was so brave and courageous," says Visconti. "And his energy was still incredible for a man who had cancer. He never showed any fear. He was just all business about making the album."

The Blackstar sessions were loose and experimental, with Bowie and Visconti taking some inspiration from D'Angelo's Black Messiah and Kendrick Lamar's To Pimp a Butterfly, which came out after sessions were well underway. Bowie would eat lunch in the studio lounge with the band each day, ordering in from a local sandwich spot called Olive's. "It was a vibe-y, cosy environment," says keyboardist Jason Lindner, whose array of vintage sounds helped define Blackstar's ambience. On his 68th birthday, Iman stopped by with sushi from Nobu, and the band members made him a surprise recording of their outré take on "Happy Birthday". Muffin, his assistant's dog, was around a lot, and "always made him smile", adds Lindner.



#### **GOLDEN YEARS**

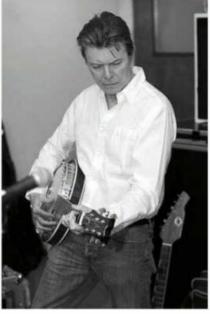
Above: Bowie in June 2004 at the Isle of Wight Festival. Later that month he would play his last ever full concert. Right: In the studio recording his 2013 album, *The Next Day.* 

In addition to the seven songs on *Black-star* and the three extras used in *Lazarus*, Visconti says there are five strong outtakes, including a *Hunky Dory*-ish track called "When Things Go Bad". Visconti expects them to come out soon on a deluxe edition.

All the while, Bowie was undergoing chemo, and at one time, his prognosis seemed bright. "He was optimistic because he was doing the chemo and it was working," says Visconti, "and at one point in the middle of last year, he was in remission. I was thrilled. And he was a bit apprehensive. He said, 'Well, don't celebrate too quickly. For now, I'm in remission, and we'll see how it goes.' And he continued the chemotherapy. So I thought he was going to make it."

But Bowie still embedded enough intimations of mortality into his lyrics – and majesty in the music – that *Blackstar* seemed very much like a fitting goodbye. "I think he thought if he was going to die, this would be a great way to go," says Visconti. "This would be a great statement to make."

Bowie was well aware that *Lazarus*, too, served that purpose, with its existential themes and its summational use of his entire catalogue. But even as he engineered twin artistic departures for David Bowie, he was doing everything he could to stick around as David Jones. "I deeply



felt that he really didn't want to die," says van Hove. "It was a fight not against death but a fight to live. And living, for him, was being a real family man. He loved to go home, to be at home with his daughter, with his wife, his family."

Bowie was also working on yet another project: two extraordinary music videos, directed by Johan Renck. The clip for the otherworldly 10-minute-long title track of *Blackstar* is a complex, cryptic valedictory statement with nods to Aleister Crowley and old Bowie iconography – most blatantly, a long-dead astronaut who may well be Major Tom. The song has distinct sections, and in the video they're sung by brand-new Bowie personae: the eerie Buttoneyes (Bowie with buttons placed over bandaged eyes); a preacher; and the

charismatic, sassy trickster who sings the song's swaggering middle section: "You're a flash in the pan/I'm the Great I Am." Almost all of it began with drawings Bowie sent to Renck.

It was Renck's idea to film the Buttoneyes character lying in bed for the "Lazarus" video – a setting that now evokes a deathbed. In November, about a month after he shot that video, Bowie's cancer came back, according to Visconti. This time, doctors told him it was terminal. "It had spread all over his body," says Visconti, "so there's no recovering from that."

Bowie wasn't feeling well enough to attend previews of *Lazarus*, but he made it to opening night, enduring a gauntlet of press photographers on his way in, one last time. He had about a month to live, but he told van Hove that it was time to start working on a second musical. At the end of the show, he collapsed backstage, for the second time in a decade.

In those final weeks, he still somehow found time and energy to record demos for five entirely new songs. A week before his death, just before *Blackstar*'s release, he FaceTimed Visconti and told him he wanted to make one more album, a follow-up to *Blackstar*.

"I was thrilled," Visconti says, "and I thought, and he must have thought, that he'd have a few months, at least. So the end must've been very rapid. I'm not privy to it. I don't know exactly, but he must've taken ill very quickly after that phone call."

The news of Bowie's death surprised even the collaborators who knew of his illness. Others, like the actors in *Lazarus*, had no idea he was sick. In the first show after Bowie's death, Michael C. Hall, who plays Newton, was so conscious of his lines' new resonance that he could barely get them out.

Renck knew that Bowie was ill, but he was unaware that he had taken a turn for the worse. Like other viewers, he's newly focused on the end of the "Lazarus" video. Bowie, dressed in a *Man Who Fell to Earth/Station to Station*-era costume – black with diagonal stripes – backs into a wooden wardrobe that resembles a coffin. As the song's final guitar chord fades, he pulls the door shut behind him and disappears into darkness.

The exit wasn't Bowie's idea, but he embraced it. "Somebody on set said, 'You should end the video by disappearing into the closet'," says Renck. "And I saw David sort of think about that for a second. Then a big smile came up on his face. And he said something like, 'Yeah, that will keep them all guessing, won't it?'"

Additional reporting by
DAVID BROWNE, PATRICK DOYLE,
ANDY GREENE and SIMON
VOZICK-LEVINSON

#### TRIBUTES

## Mick Jagger

David - which is weird - but we used to hang out in London a lot in the early days of the Seventies; we were at a lot of parties together. He

would come around my house and play me all his music – I remember him playing me different mixes of "Jean Genie", which was really kind of Stones-y, in a way. That's what I enjoyed: watching him develop as an artist.

There was always an exchange of information within our friendship. And I suppose there was always an element of competition between us, but it never felt overwhelming. When he'd come over, we'd talk about our work – a new guitarist, a new way of writing, style and photographers. We had a lot in common in wanting to do new

things onstage – using interesting designs, narratives, personalities.

He'd always look at my clothes labels. When he would see me, he'd give me a hug, and I could feel him going up behind the collar of my shirt to see what I was wearing. He used to copy me sometimes, but he'd be very honest about it. If he took one of your moves, he'd say, "That's one of yours – I just tried it." I didn't mind shar-

'VE PLAYED AT BEING A ROCK &

roll star, but I'm really not one. David

Bowie is my idea of a rock star. Right

now, I'm in Myanmar, a little cut off from

the reaction to David's passing, but I can

assure you the sky is a lot darker here with-

on Top of the Pops in 1972, singing "Star-

man". He was so vivid. So luminous. So

fluorescent. We had one of the first co-

lour TVs on our street, and David Bowie

was the reason to have a colour TV. I've

said he was our Elvis Presley. There are so

many similarities: the masculine-feminine duality, the mastery of being onstage. They

created original silhouettes, shapes now

seen as obvious, that did not exist before.

but I'm more of a fan. He came and visit-

I'd like to consider myself David's friend,

The first time I saw him perform was

out the Starman.

"There was competition between us, but it never felt overwhelming."



Jagger and Bowie in London, 1999

ing things with him, because he would share so much with me – it was a two-way street.

We were very close in the Eighties in New York. We'd hang out a lot and go out to dance clubs. We were very influenced by the New York downtown scene back then. That's why "Let's Dance" is my favourite song of his – it reminds me of those times, and it has such a great groove.

My favourite memory was the time we did "Dancing in the Street" together. We had to record the song and film the video

all in one day. We enjoyed camping it up. The video is hilarious to watch. It was the only time we really collaborated on anything, which is really stupid when you think about it.

Later on, he bought a house in Mustique, where I have a place, and we used to hang out in the West Indies. David was so relaxed there, and so kind to everyone. He did a lot of work making health care better for local people; I was doing school charity work, and he would come with me there and do story time with the local kids.

I know David stopped touring around 2004 after having some health problems. After that, he kind of vanished, both from my life and the stage, so to speak, until he came back with an album that was a very interesting piece. It's really sad when somebody leaves and you haven't spoken to them for a long while. You wish you'd done this, you wish you'd done that. But that's what happens. Strange things happen in life.

## Bono

"He was so vivid, so luminous. The sky is darker without him."

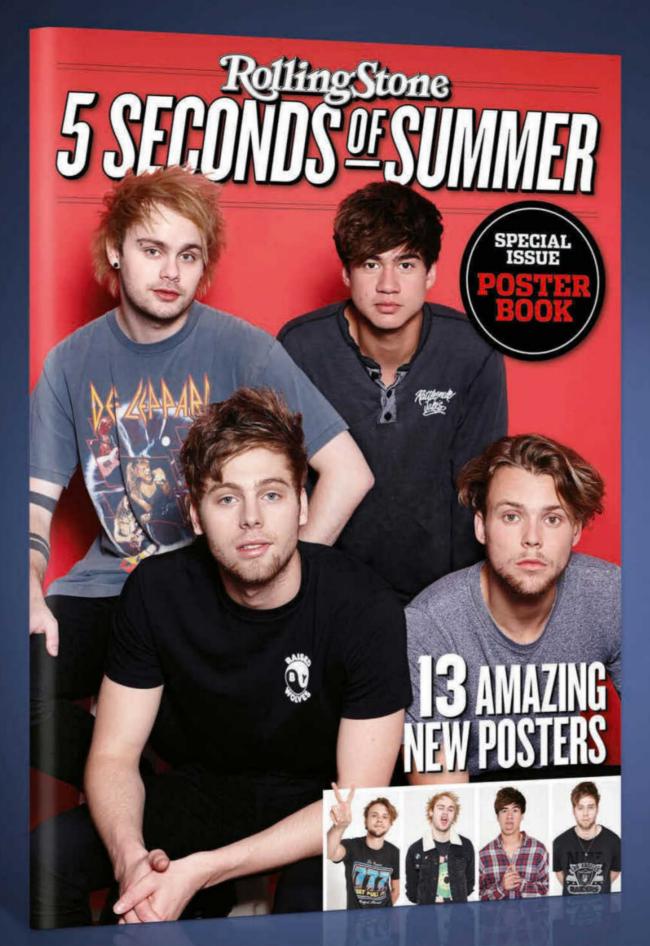


ed us when we were mixing *Achtung Baby* – and, of course, he had introduced us to Berlin and to Hansa Studios. We had a playful sort of banter – he would really go

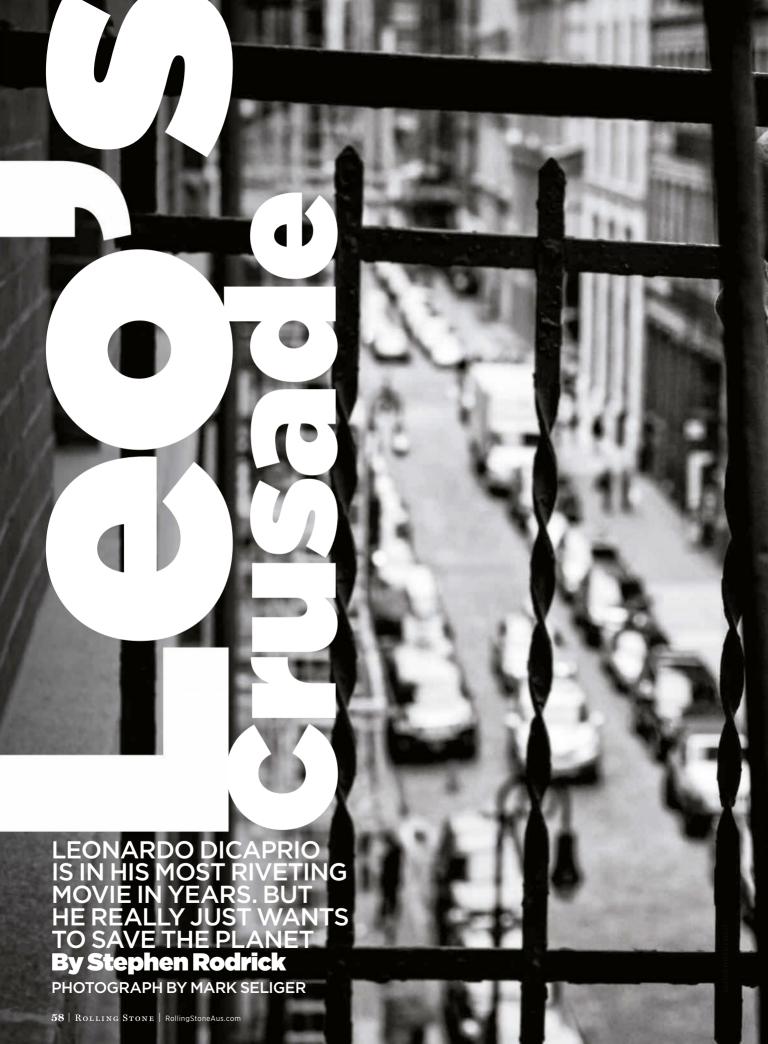
there in conversations, and we would even occasionally hurt each other's feelings. He took his daughter to a matinee to see *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, and he sent me the reasons he didn't like it. And everything he said was really helpful, because it was in the early days.

Ultimately, as a songwriter and as a performer, your currencies are thoughts and feelings. Some people may have original thoughts, but the musical landscape is not that unique. You have to be able to close your eyes and just feel the songs and say, "What part of me is being played by those notes?" Or, "Who else plays them?"

And in Bowie's case, the answer is nobody. His musical landscape affects you in a way that is completely different from all other music. That part of me is only played by David Bowie.



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EONARDO WILHELM DICAPRIO'S parents hung a painting above his crib in the grotty 1970s East Hollywood neighbourhood of Los Angeles when he was a baby. The painting wasn't an ac-

tion shot of Peter Rabbit or Curious George. No, it was a reproduction of Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch's three-panelled "Garden of Earthly Delights", a dystopian visual description of Eden being found and lost. It is one of DiCaprio's earliest memories. ¶ "You literally see Adam and Eve being given paradise," says DiCaprio, his blue eyes peering above sunglasses in

a Miami Beach restaurant that has somehow worked "SoHo" into its name. Underneath the table he fidgets his feet in and out of canvas loafers. He drifts away for a moment. DiCaprio just finished shooting an interview for a climate-change film he's making. (Original working title: *Are We Fucked?*) He's already been to India flood plains and the Antarctica polar cap, and now he's not far from the Miami playgrounds where he once reputedly left a nightclub with every woman from his VIP section. All, according to DiCaprio, could be washed away.

He snaps back to the painting. "Then you see in the middle this overpopulation and excess, people enjoying the fruits of what this environment's given us," he says. He laughs a sad laugh punctuated by the DiCaprio smile that can be mistaken for a sneer. "Then the last panel is just charred, black skies with a burnt-down apocalypse." He stops for a second before shrugging. "That was my favourite painting."

Halfway between mother and maker, Leonardo DiCaprio is not unhappily marooned between the bright light of his own life – a looming Oscar, a personal fossil collection, a chauffeured rental Tesla – and the bleakness of the overheated world he inhabits with denialist Republicans and a Bangladesh coastline that could be nearly a quarter underwater by 2050. He wants us to move off fossil fuels entirely and wonders where we would be if we had spent billions on finding renewable energy sources rather than on the Iraq War.

"He has an intellectual restlessness," says longtime collaborator Martin Scorsese. "He devours books and texts and information."

Contributing editor Stephen Rodrick profiled Ringo Starr in RS 763.

A friend might tell DiCaprio to lighten up, but that's not going to happen. "There are very few civilians who have the same understanding that this guy has of climate change. Leo's a wonk," says Mark Ruffalo, who has just combined forces with DiCaprio on the Solutions Project, a group of scientists and stars hoping to move America toward full renewable-energy use. "He's putting his ass on the line."

DiCaprio's life-is-brutish-and-short worldview has permeated his post-*Titanic* film choices, especially his work with Scorsese, from *Gangs of New York* to *The Wolf of Wall Street*. He is now starring in *The Revenant*, the bleak tale of trapper Hugh Glass, whose body is demolished by a very angry grizzly, and who loses his family to the viciousness of the White Man. (Making matters worse, he must drag around Moses' neck beard.)

"We went with the purpose of seeing what nature was saying," says DiCaprio of shooting "The Revenant". The response? "This crazy, insane message that stopped production." Eventually, Glass is double-crossed by a man with half a scalp. He is left for dead, rides a horse off a cliff, sleeps in its carcass and chews on a bison liver. He remains mute for weeks. These are the lighter moments between arrows exploding arteries and knives removing testicles. During the *Fitzcarraldo*-esque shoot in the Canadian Rockies and Argentina, director Alejandro González Iñárritu burned through crew members. Iñárritu says that in their downtime he and DiCaprio would chew their own facial hair to pass the hours.

After that experience, maybe a *Catch Me If You Can*-style light comedy for Di-Caprio? Not bloody likely.

"I would love to do something even darker," says DiCaprio with a devious smile. He knows he sounds slightly mad. "I don't know, like how would you penetrate the mind of somebody like Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*? There's a word in German that they don't have in the English language that's called *schadenfreude*. It means humiliation for somebody else." He smirks. "It's what I see sometimes when I watch certain politicians, but it can be done in movies, like when Travis Bickle takes [Cybill Shepherd] to the porno theatre for his first date. You're like, 'Oh, God, please don't do this!"

Not everything is so dark. There are still starlets, scuba diving and industrialist friends named Vlad with giant yachts. I ask him later if he's afraid of slipping down into the gloaming like some character from a movie about a doomed 1912 cruise ship.

"I work hard at trying to create a balance."

Successful?

"We'll see."

He makes his excuses and stands up. It's time to jump into a helicopter and check out the suburban sprawl that threatens the Everglades. He takes a puff on a vaping device, exuding a maple-syrup smell that makes me want pancakes. He pulls a watch cap over his eyes and ducks out through the restaurant's service alley. His chauffeured Tesla peels out for the heliport. A man left behind speaks into a wrist device, inadvertently proving that Leonardo DiCaprio is not just a man but also an organic commodity that can be used for good or evil.

"The package has left the building. I repeat: The package has left the building."



question on the table: Is this the year Leonardo DiCaprio finally wins an Oscar, after four nominations?

"Sure, everyone likes to be recognised, but that's out of my hands – other people control those things," DiCaprio tells me as he preps for an interview with a hurricane expert. "I will say it would help the film, bring it to more people."

The Revenant is like free guacamole to hungry film critics, with Birdman director Iñárritu at the helm and bestliving cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki shooting scenery that out-Malicks Terrence Malick. But it could be a tough sell to punters plopping down \$10 at the West Des Moines multiplex on date night. There are only two female characters in the film. One is murdered; the other is gang-raped by French trappers. The film is 156 minutes long, and it becomes quickly evident that any white character not named Hugh Glass is going to make the worst possible moral choice imaginable. But DiCaprio's performance holds this cinematic hellscape together. (When Iñárritu saw him with his long beard, he exulted, "This man is a fucking trapper!")

DiCaprio is largely silent for the film, a feat harder than it sounds.

"He uses his body, which is wounded, and a pair of eyes to convey so many emotions in takes that are six or eight minutes long," says Iñárritu. "He has to make us believe that he is cold, that he is wounded, that he is devastated, that he is angry, that he is hopeless. Without one word, you have to understand what this guy is thinking and feeling." There's a scene where Di-Caprio finds his dead son and is broken. But he hears a crow singing beyond the trees. You can see him taking in death and life simultaneously.

"He was interacting and listening to every piece of nature and wind, and reacting to that," remembers Iñárritu. "That's the most difficult thing to do, and in the moment that he did that, I said, 'This guy is really present. He has this rhythm, and he owns that rhythm.'"

OR DICAPRIO, THE ROOTS OF The Revenant and his environmental work all began with a meeting with then-Vice President Al Gore in 1998. DiCaprio had grown up with a melancholy for extinct creatures – he once impressed Dr.

Kirk Johnson, the director of the National Museum of Natural History, with his knowledge of the long-gone great auk, a bird hunted to extinction in the 1800s.

"I remember the thing that I got the most sad about when I was little was the loss of species that have been as a result of mankind's intrusion on nature," says Di-Caprio, whose Los Angeles home features a massive fossil collection. He then mentions three species, only one of which I'd ever heard of: "Like the quagga or the Tasmanian tiger or the dodo bird."

Titanic came out in 1997, and DiCaprio went from promising actor of his generation to one of the most famous faces on the planet. There was the requisite news of bawdy behaviour and a slew of model girlfriends, some of which still trickles out in the tabloids, as he remains single. You can ask him about it, but he will wave it off, saying, "I liked it when you went to see a movie and you didn't know everything about the actor."

Like Warren Beatty, Robert Redford and Paul Newman before him, DiCaprio longed to be seen as something more than just a panty-dropper. A friend set up a meeting with Gore. The vice president sketched out the planet and the atmosphere on a chalkboard and told the actor, "You want to be involved in environmental issues? This is the most important thing facing all of humanity and the future."

At first, it was just appearances at Earth Day events and the occasional conference, and then there was the narration of his climate-change film *The 11th Hour* in 2007. But in the past decade, it has gone from passion to obsession. "I am consumed by this," says DiCaprio. "There isn't a couple of hours a day where I'm not thinking about it. It's this slow burn. It's not 'aliens invading our planet next week and we have to get up and fight to defend our country', but it's this inevitable thing, and it's so terrifying."

A couple of years ago, DiCaprio met with a casual friend, the actor Fisher Stevens, once known as Michelle Pfeiffer's ex and the ethnically dubious star of *Short Circuit 2*, but now an accomplished documentary producer. The two had become reacquainted while filming the disappearing reefs in the Galapagos, an event made memorable for DiCaprio's scuba tank malfunctioning while shooting footage and DiCaprio desperately looking for someone to help him to the top. He (of course) found Ed Norton, who shared air with DiCaprio as they slowly ascended to avoid the bends.

Stevens and DiCaprio talked of shooting a climate-change film that would feature DiCaprio as a man on a global pursuit for the truth. The film would be equal parts gonzo, absurd and scare-the-shit-out-of-you testimonials from scientists and leaders. (There's a Joaquin Phoenix quality to some of it, with DiCaprio, in full *Revenant* shagginess, interviewing a pristine Bill Clinton with the New York skyline behind him.)

Just as preproduction was starting for the doc, funding came through for The Revenant. Rather than pass on either project, DiCaprio chose to see a symmetry between the two, with Hugh Glass representing a man on the front end of the West's destruction of the land and the extermination of other cultures, and DiCaprio's documentary set two centuries later as the world faces the bill for all the raping and pillaging. The links grew stronger as DiCaprio visited the hellish Alberta, Canada, tar-sand oil fields, several hours north of the breathless mountains and streams of the Revenant set. Meanwhile, filming was repeatedly hampered by a lack of snow as Alberta "enjoyed" the warmest winter on record. The connections left Iñárritu and Di-Caprio shaking their heads as they suffered through multiple delays.

"It was a parallel universe," remembers Iñárritu. "We discussed it at length. It was scary to be depicting how it all started in this country, and now we're suffering 200 years of consequences for that. It was a mirror. It was funny and scary as hell." "We went out there with the purpose of discovering something and seeing what nature was saying," says DiCaprio about the shoot. He flexes his hands open and shut in frustration. "That was never directly articulated, but it was like, 'OK, what happens if we put ourselves in the elements? What are we gonna discover?' The thing that I was left with was this crazy, insane message of nature fighting back and essentially stopping production." Later, he put it more bluntly. "The big question is, is it all too late?"

As the documentary crew travels from global bleak spot to bleak spot, Stevens has occasionally had to remind DiCaprio not to wallow too much in hopelessness. "I'm more the light and he's the dark," says Stevens with a grin. "I'm always say-

In the past decade, climate change has gone from his passion to an obsession. "I am consumed by this," says DiCaprio. "There isn't a couple of hours every day that I'm not thinking about it."

ing, 'Don't be so fucking pessimistic, man. If we make a movie where it's already too late, what are we making the movie for?'"
Stevens smiles hopefully. "Leo gets that."
We'll see. DiCaprio has final cut.

T'S THE SUNDAY AFTER THANKS-giving, and Miami Beach is in a sleepy interlude between turkey and the hordes arriving later in the week for Art Basel, which is Sundance for the art crowd. Stevens and his crew are setting up in the city hall offices of Mayor Philip Levine to ask him about how rising waters are threatening the city (a line of questioning partially inspired by a 2013 ROLLING STONE article by Jeff Goodell). DiCaprio arrives looking tired in a short-sleeved polka-dot blue shirt and droopy jeans exposing powder-blue boxers. He stretches theatrically.

"I think I got too much sleep last night." Stevens laughs. "That would be a first." DiCaprio is two-tracking obligations

DiCaprio is two-tracking obligations as details of *The Revenant* have started seeping out and his camp has had to tamp down rumours that he was sexually as-

saulted by a grizzly in one of the film's gory passages ("That's not what's happening"). Then a veteran movie blogger said that he loved the film but there was no way women were going to sit through the gorefest. "I think it's silly, and I think that the women I've spoken to really enjoyed the movie," says DiCaprio.

But after a quick hairbrush session, Di-Caprio shifts into environmental-warrior mode. Stevens gives him a list of questions, but he largely wings it. First, Di-Caprio and Levine talk of mutual friends, including billionaire Russian construction magnate Vladislav Doronin.

"Our good mutual friend Vlad says hello," says Levine, before telling a story about Doronin offering to take him out for an ocean swim and Levine joking about his fear of not returning.

"Vlad is a lot of fun," admits DiCaprio, adding how much he enjoys Doronin's Aman Resorts, discrete seven-star accommodations scattered across the globe.

Then they begin to talk. DiCaprio asks Levine if he's worried about declining real-estate prices.

"I'm not going to preside over Miami Beach becoming Venice," says Levine. "I think property levels are just going to continue to rise."

DiCaprio doesn't agree, saying he'd already unloaded his beach house: "I wouldn't take that bet."

Levine wants to show DiCaprio some of the work the glitzy resort town is doing to lessen the impact of rising tides, so we pile into the Tesla while the mayor travels in a black SUV. DiCaprio understands no mayor is going to come out in public and say, "Sell your condo, we're screwed", but he doesn't share his optimism. "You know what they're doing now?" DiCaprio asks. "They're building high-rises where the lobby can flood and the rest of the building can just continue on. But he's right, prices are still going up. It's unbelievable."

We stop at a section of streets that the city has raised one-and-a-half metres to provide a bulwark against the sea. The two do a walk-and-talk while Sunday brunchers begin to gawk and stalk at a careful distance.

We eventually reach the water, and it's horrifying in an affluent kind of way. The water level has risen to nearly equal with boat docks, rendering ladders leading into the ocean irrelevant. DiCaprio and Levine walk out on a tenuous sea wall and look across the bay to where, coincidentally, their friend Vlad's yacht glitters in the morning light. The mayor admits that the city needs \$400 million to build new sea walls and a system of pumps and to raise roads. And that number doesn't even include sand from the Bahamas.

DiCaprio nearly does a spit take.

"The Bahamas?"

The mayor nods and says Bahamas sand can be cheaper than American sand.

During a stop in the interview, Di-Caprio points at a tan older gentleman combing his luxurious silver hair on a balcony in a nearby high-rise.

"Look at that guy," says DiCaprio. "He has no idea what is going on." DiCaprio watches him with fascination for a moment and then makes a joke. "He probably knows that he'll be dead soon and won't have to worry about it." He glumly says goodbye to the mayor, and tosses his swag of Miami Beach caps and cuff links into his trunk.

He settles into the back of the Tesla. "The Bahamas, did you hear that?"

The conversation turns to places like Bangladesh that don't have the

ing? Perhaps, but DiCaprio was and is single, and you can see skeezy womanising at Buffalo Wild Wings on a Thursday night. There has been some twisted comeuppance; in 2005, DiCaprio had to get more than a dozen stitches to his billion-dollar face after a Hollywood Hills party when a former model slashed him with broken glass, a shot that may have been intended for someone else.

Beneath that reputation has been an actor devoted to his craft since his early tweens. DiCaprio was partially raised by an underground artist, his father, George DiCaprio, a comic-book author and distributor. Leo grew up in Los Angeles, but not the Los Angeles of Hollywoodland.

Maguire. "I've got plenty of new friends through the years, too, but I've held on to some of them for 25 years now," says Di-Caprio. "There's an inherent comfort level that can't be duplicated and can't be manufactured. You don't have to do catch-up interviews – they're up-to-date."

There was a part on the 1990s ABC sitcom *Growing Pains*, in the classic ratings-booster role of boy without a home. But it all changed when he beat out Maguire and others for the lead in an adaptation of Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life*, starring opposite Robert De Niro. DiCaprio's father had taken his boy to a screening of De Niro's *Midnight Run* a few years earlier and told him if he wanted to be an actor, De Niro

was the one to watch. Di-Caprio thought he blew the audition by screaming his lines, but De Niro liked his intensity.

De Niro recommended DiCaprio to Scorsese, and when the actor and director worked together for the first time, on 2002's Gangs of New York, it was a 26-year-old DiCaprio who was dispatched to Daniel Day-Lewis' New York brownstone to try to lure him out of retirement, sitting with him on a Central Park bench and silently waiting for him to make the first move.

DiCaprio is cagey about his next film, but he's been casting about for a project that speaks to his politics. He dreams of releasing his documentary in tandem with *The* 

Revenant's DVD release, and he has already optioned an unwritten book on the Volkswagen emissions scandal. There's a great narrative film to be made about the environment, insists DiCaprio – it's just a matter of finding the right project.

"I don't know how to crack this yet, but I would love to do something that isn't about waves crashing on the Empire State Building," he says.

We're eating at a posh Miami restaurant, and a stray little girl wanders by, with no clue that she is eyeing one of the world's most famous movie stars. Di-Caprio takes off his sunglasses and offers a long *aww*. I ask him if he sees time in his life for a family. He responds abruptly, the only time in our two days together.

"Do you mean do I want to bring children into a world like this?" says Di-Caprio. "If it happens, it happens. I'd prefer not to get into specifics about it, just because then it becomes something that is misquoted. But, yeah." He shifts uncomfortably in his chair. "I don't know. To articulate how I feel about it [Cont. on 105]



money to deal with the rising waters. "The story of climate change is gonna be places with the most military power to protect their own resources," says Di-Caprio, hitting the vape pipe. "The billions of people that haven't contributed to this problem are gonna be the first to suffer."

Above, the sun tries to break through morning clouds and shine light through the Tesla's opaque roof. It is not successful.

HE IMAGE OF DICAPRIO AS an empty libertine gorging in his own garden of earthly delights – which has stuck since he rolled with a travelling pack of ruffians derisively labelled the Pussy Posse back in the 1990s – isn't any more true or false than it was with leadingman predecessors like Redford and George Clooney. (DiCaprio recently ended his relationship with model Kelly Rohrbach, according to reports; before that, the best rumour was of a casual liaison with Rihanna.) Has there been skeezy womanis-

As a kid, he saw junkies in the alleyways and prostitutes at the nearby hotel. After a halcyon stay at a progressive school near UCLA, he returned to his neighbourhood school for junior high, where he was regularly beaten up.

"I was a bit of a loudmouth, and I was in an environment where the elements aligned to have kids smack the hell outta me once in a while," DiCaprio tells me with a smile.

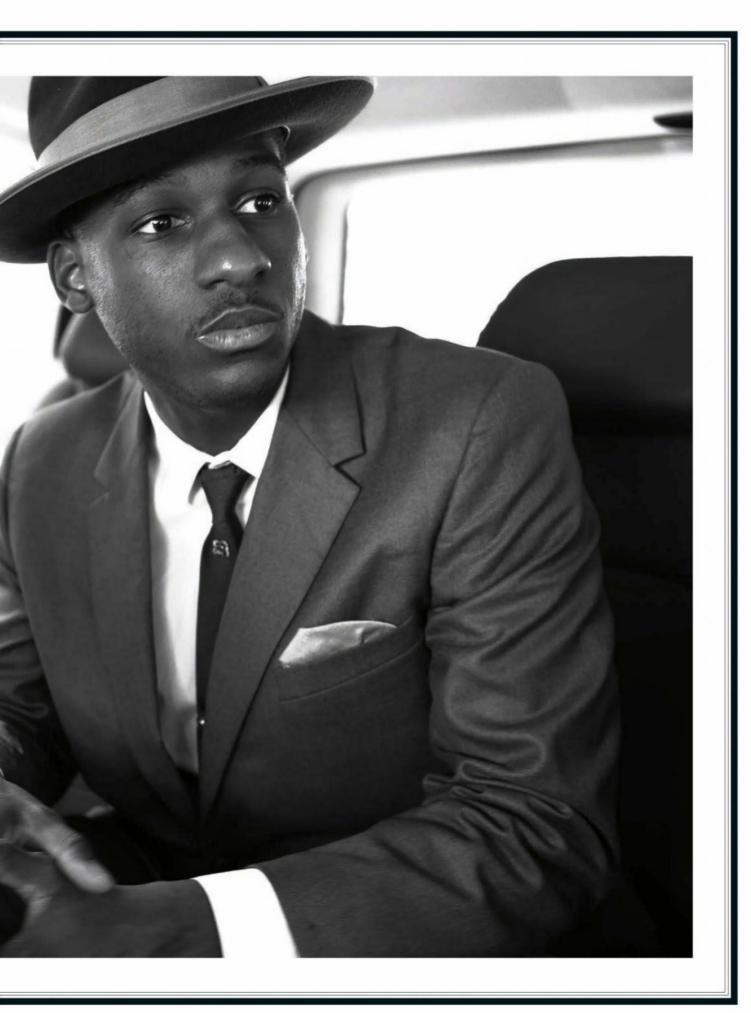
DiCaprio found refuge in drama classes and started hitting auditions, driven by his mother, Irmelin, his most patient supporter and critic. (She's been known to critique the wardrobe authenticity in his films.) There were cattle calls, a Matchbox commercial and a year when he wasn't cast in anything. Instead, he took to his room and spent a year watching movies with his father's guidance, developing a taste for films like *East of Eden* and *A Face in the Crowd*.

He knew acting was what he wanted to do and started making friends at auditions with other dreamers, like Tobey



SOUL SINGER Leon Bridges turned heads on his first ever Australian tour last month. We tagged along for the day when he hit Melbourne ...

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
IAN LAIDLAW



#### LEON BRIDGES





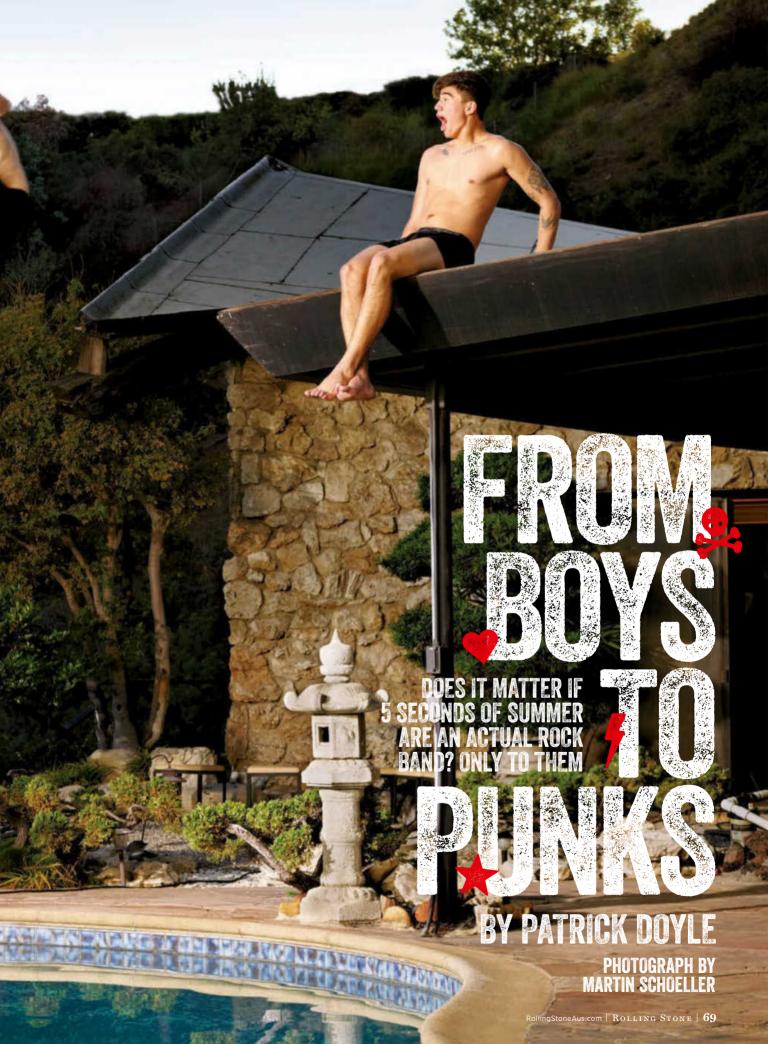












## THE CALIFORNIA SUN IS LOW IN THE SKY OVER BEL AIR, BUT AT 5 SECONDS OF SUMMER'S HOUSE, THE DAY HAS YET TO BEGIN. THERE ARE RED-WINE STAINS ON

the floorboards by the pool on the canyonside deck, which overlooks the Chateau des Fleurs, a \$100 million mansion that's been on the market since it was built, and the Pacific Ocean in the distance. A fireplace is surrounded by empty beer bottles. "They should be up soon," says the band's English assistant, Zoë, who reads a book as we wait. She occasionally tries texting the band in favour of knocking on bedroom doors. Nobody responds.

Luke Hemmings, the Sydney pop band's heartthrob frontman, wanders downstairs to the kitchen, unshaven, wearing only a T-shirt and tight black boxer briefs. His elfin blond coif - the inspiration for a number of YouTube hair tutorials - is a ruffled mess. He spreads some avocado on toast. "Sorry I'm in my underwear," he mumbles. "I'm really hungover." He shuffles back to his room.

Around 5 p.m., the day starts moving. Bassist Calum Hood - who's 19 but still looks like the high school soccer player he was a few years ago - comes outside with a glass of Coke, his nails painted black, wearing a Billabong hat. "Let me put some bourbon in this," he says, returning to the kitchen. Guitarist Michael Clifford is roaming around inside, but Hood is giving him a wide berth. "He's still feeling it," says the bassist, lighting up a Camel. But eventually Clifford materialises, wearing a fully unbuttoned shirt, pale, but fresher than expected. "I'm fuckin' alive!" he says. "Sorry. I was literally dying today."

people, which sucks," Clifford says. Hem-

Last night, the band performed at the American Music Awards. "A lot of fake

mings complains, "It's just, like, Viners and Internet personalities, those kind of

people. Fucking pisses me off! Why are you here?"

After the show, Clifford and Hemmings hit their friend Nick Jonas' party, then crashed one thrown by Justin Bieber at their favourite bar, the Nice Guy. They didn't talk to Bieber - "I think he hates us," says Clifford - but they had a good time. "It was fucking crazy, people standing on tables and shit," he continues. "I probably shouldn't say this, but he had his own album on loop for, like, two or three hours." Clifford ended up in Beverly Hills at the Weeknd's house party, which was so exclusive that the pool area had its own bouncer. Drummer Ashton Irwin the band's oldest and perhaps most responsible member - had been there earlier but left shortly after he was jostled up against a wall as Diddy and his crew pushed through the entrance.

Welcome to the life of 5 Seconds of Summer, arguably the hottest band in the world. Just a few years ago, they were classmates in the suburbs outside Sydney, posting Bieber and Bruno Mars covers on YouTube. After 5SOS plugged in and punked up their look, One Direction took them on a 63-date arena tour in 2013; they are now the first band in history to have their first two albums debut at Number One in America. The epic fouryear journey has been immortalised in How Did We End Up Here?, a new documentary that traces the rise of 5SOS (pronounced "FIVE-sauce" by fans) from webstreams to Wembley.

At this point, their celebrity has eclipsed that of their pop-punk idols Good Charlotte and Sum 41, but 5SOS have an entirely different kind of fame: They get re-tweeted at dizzying speeds by their teenage-girl fans (more than 13,000 in a minute); they top the "mostreblogged" chart on Tumblr; they are the subject of fan fiction, some of which features bondage sex and cross-dressing. "I don't read that shit," says Hood, "It scares me." In Las Vegas, 60 fans were busted for crawling through a venue's air vents, attempting to sneak into a 5SOS show. "The screaming is a very stressful thing, but an awesome thing," says Irwin.

Last January, the band's label, Capitol, paid for 5SOS to move into the Bel Air house and write their new album for three months. "It was a fucking dream come true," says Irwin. But the band finished it early. "So we just had parties all the time," says Hemmings. "We had some pretty great parties at the start of the year, and they kind of got better and better. The last one, the ratio was huge."

Three nights ago, Clifford threw a 20th-birthday bash. 5SOS borrowed a house in Beverly Hills, but they were kicked out at 1 a.m., so they directed everyone back here. When they arrived, 20 people were already waiting outside. Details are hazy, but the rest of the night included an outdoor fire with Niall Horan of One Direction and a game of Rock Band at 6 a.m., and also, quite likely, vodka shots, swimming and a New Found Glory dance party in the kitchen. Clifford proudly displays one of his favourite presents, given to him by Josh Dun, the drummer of the band Twenty One Pilots: a Fleshlight, a flashlight-shape device with a plastic vagina on one end ("The #1 Male Masturbator," the packaging reads). "You've never used one of these?" Clifford asks with a grin.

He sits down in the kitchen, as the band's groomer goes to work spraying his hair for a video shoot tonight, for the band's new single, "Jet Black Heart". Everybody calls Clifford 5SOS's most punkrock member - the band's Sid Vicious, if Vicious came up covering All Time Low and Ed Sheeran. He's tattooed, with studded earrings, his right wrist covered in black bracelets, many given to him by admirers. Today his hair is red; fans keep track of his dozen-plus dye jobs in online charts, colours like "fairyfloss", "emo purple" and "seaweed". "You've been skunk, too," says Kelsey, the stylist. "I've built up this persona where I've got to just keep dying it now," Clifford says. "And let's face it, half of pop punk is just the hair."

5SOS are coming off a year of what Hemmings calls "relentless" promo. "If I have to be asked who my celebrity crush is one more fucking time...," he says. (So you don't have to ask: It's Mila Kunis.) They've gamely imitated animal sounds on Swedish TV, and been asked to describe their new record using only emojis.

But there's one question that bothers them the most: "Are you a boy band?" They were called one just last night, at an industry party, when Hemmings was introduced to a new group. "They said,

Associate editor Patrick Doyle wrote about Buddy Guy in RS 770.



'We're in a boy band, too'," he says. "I was like, 'I'm walking away now.'"

AND THE STATE OF

"Seventy-five per cent of our lives is proving we're a real band," says Irwin. "We're getting good at it now. We don't want to just be, like, for girls. We want to be for everyone. That's the great mission that we have. I'm already seeing a few male fans start to pop up, and that's cool. If the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and all those guys can do it, we can do it, too."

There is much work to be done. The band recently announced an arena tour that starts in February and lasts at least until the end of the year. After spending pretty much every day of the past four years together, tensions are evident. "Some people snap a little and some people say things they wouldn't normally say," Hood says.

Clifford – who suffers from mild depression – seems to be having the hardest time. He's spent many of his days this year inside, playing Call of Duty. But lately he's hitting the town hard.

"It's all about finding things to make you happy," says Clifford. "And for me, this week, it has been partying."



CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE GOING to a Good Charlotte show tonight!" says Hemmings at a crowded West Hollywood restaurant. Across the table is one of 5 Seconds of Summer's producers and co-writers, John

Feldmann, frontman of Goldfinger, the Warped Tour-era ska-punk band that emerged in the late Nineties. One of Feldmann's biggest scores came in 1999, when Goldfinger's song "Superman" was used prominently in Tony Hawk's Pro Skater video game.

Feldmann is a friendly and fast-talking guy, in a suit and bleach-blond hair. He looks over the Italian menu but struggles to find something because he's on a diet. "Nine days – no gluten, no caffeine, no carbs," he says. "I'm just jacking off every second of every day."

Since he started working with them in 2013, Feldmann has become the unofficial band dad. (They went to his house for Thanksgiving.) They have a side project with him called Wormstein, where they wear animal masks and recently filmed a low-budget video of a 30-second hard-core-punk original called "Doughnuts".

He first heard 5SOS in London, while he was working with pop duo the Veronicas, whose singer, Jessica Origliasso, was a friend of Clifford. "I never in a million years would have said they would be on the cover of Rolling Stone in two years," says Feldmann. "I had so many fucking people say that 'guitars are over. They are over. It's all EDM and programming. And that's what people wanna

hear.' And thank God, they proved them all wrong."

The band could have opted to work with hitmakers like Max Martin after the success of their first album but chose to stick with Feldmann. He's just one of the veteran pop punkers working with 5SOS – Sum 41's Deryck Whibley, All Time Low's Alex Gaskarth, and Benji and Joel Madden of Good Charlotte have also cowritten with the band.

5SOS are also big Creed and Nickelback fans. "I think Australians are just naturally addicted to cock rock," says Hood. "Because I fuckin' love it." The band even did a co-writing session with Chad Kroeger recently, but it didn't work



"SEVENTY-FIVE PER
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out. "It was just a fucking Nickelback song," says Irwin.

The band loves talking about Kroeger. "He ordered 12 chicken strips and a Caesar salad," says Irwin. "It was so funny, man." Hood drops his voice an octave to imitate Kroeger: "He was like, 'Fuck. I'm so unhealthy. I order this every day."

"At the end of the day, he was like, 'Shit, I feel stressed'," says Irwin. "He's like, 'You guys ever look up shit on the Internet?' We're like, 'What type of shit?' He's like, 'Girl stuff, like, hot girls dancing.' So he goes on YouTube and writes 'hot chicks dancing' in the search. And we sat there watching hot chicks dancing. It was such a creepy dad-on-the-Internet move."

"Like a dad trying to find porn," says Clifford, mock-typing, "'Porn.com!'"

"That was definitely me when I was younger – free porn," says Hood. "I don't want none of that subscription shit. I want the free stuff."

"You guys ever Google-Image 'boobs'?" says Clifford. "When I was 11, I used to take off 'safe search' in Google Images. Oh, man, this isn't helping the article at all, is it?"

Good Charlotte were Hemmings' first rock show when he saw them at around age 12 in Sydney. "They're the reason I wanted to be in a band," he says. "I could relate to a band from a small town, talking about wanting to get out."

Now, 5SOS are returning the favour: Good Charlotte had gone from playing Madison Square Garden to performing at the House of Blues in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, when they decided to go on hiatus a few years ago and move on to behind-the-scenes work as producers. Then Feldmann put them in touch with 5 Seconds of Summer, and they wrote songs on both of their albums. "We got really inspired," Benji Madden will say onstage tonight. "And we got the pop-punk bug back!" Tonight is the Maddens' first full show in almost five years.

As Hemmings eats, he holds hands with his girlfriend, Arzaylea, a short 21-year-old brunette with a pierced nose and a shirt that says I'D RATHER BE EAT-ING. As Hemmings talks in my ear, she keeps her hand on his pants, rubbing his leg. They met at a get-together in L.A. three months ago. The party was "really bad", but Hemmings was impressed when she told him her favourite band was Arizona emo group the Maine. He invited her to 5SOS's house around 3 a.m., and they've been together ever since. He tried to keep their relationship secret for weeks, getting out of cars separately to avoid the paparazzi, but tonight it seems like he's given up. "It's hard," he says. "One of the weird things is you want it to be a secret, but you don't want it to

Arzaylea grew up in Austin and New York, and went to the Aveda Institute beauty school. "I don't use that now," she says. What does she do? "I'm an Internet influencer," she says. "I just post pictures. It's really easy." In an online Q&A, someone asked her, "Do you ever worry about money for the future since you don't have a full-time job and don't currently go to school?"

"No," she replied. "Trust fund."

Arzaylea has become a villain to Hemmings-obsessed female fans; the 5SOS online universe is full of conspiracies about her – that she's using Hemmings for his fame, speculating that she's actually 25 years old and not 21, that she's a puppet being paid by management to stir up trouble and create publicity. They've dug up sour-grapes tweets from ex-boy-friends. "You all hate me when you don't know me," she tweeted to fans. "I don't use anyone for anything. I legit can do everything on my own."

Hemmings and Arzaylea hold hands as they walk a few doors down to the Troubadour. Minutes later Good Charlotte are onstage, delivering a hits-packed set. Between songs, they make jokes about being

old and doing school drop-offs before band practice. "We're gonna take it back to 2001," Joel Madden says before "Little Things". Hemmings bounces in his seat, singing along to every word. When the VIP row gets crowded, Arzaylea climbs onto his lap, and they make out. When the band gives a shout-out to 5SOS, they raise their fists.

After the show, 5SOS head backstage, where Nicole Richie, Joel Madden's wife, directs guests to a dive-y dressing room. The Maddens are chatting with music execs about their comeback. When they spot the band, everyone hugs. "We owe these guys so much, bro," Benji Madden says, speaking over the crowd. "We were, like, over it. We were done. And then we spent, like, nine months together. Seeing them become the band that they are...I fucking

"These are my little brothers," says Joel, patting Hood on the back. "Thanks for coming to our show tonight. You made us look cool!'

love you guys. I don't know

what I would do without

you guys."

HEMMINGS, HOOD AND Clifford met at Norwest Christian College, a small private school

in a northern suburb of Sydney, where students wear blazers and "teachers use their own experience as Christians to teach from a biblical worldview in all curriculum areas", according to the website. "It was pretty strict," says Clifford. (When asked if he's religious, Clifford says that these days he doesn't go to church, but "whenever I go home, my family reminds me how blessed I am and stuff".)

Hemmings describes himself as an "aggressively average" student; his mother was a math teacher and his father owned a pool-cleaning business. Clifford and Hood had known each other for years; Hemmings arrived at Norwest in seventh grade. "He was kind of like the cool guy," says Clifford, whose parents ran a computer business. "He was kind of a dick. We didn't like each other for a while." Hemmings says, "I was chubby. My voice hadn't broken. Michael was tall and skinny and had great hair, so I was like, 'Fuck this guy.''

Adam Day, the boys' music teacher, has said Clifford showed the most ambition

early on: "Michael always said to me, 'I'm going to be a superstar one day." But it was Hemmings who first became serious about YouTube, posting a cover of Mike Posner's syrupy "Please Don't Go" in 2011, at the age of 14. Thanks to Hemmings' looks and shaky but endearing performance, the video scored 40,000 views in a few months.

TEENAGE DREAM Above: Hemmings (left) and Hood at an early gig at Sydney's Annandale Hotel. Left: Clifford, **Hood and Hemmings** at a 10th-grade formal dance at Norwest Christian College, 2011.

**PUNK'S NOT DEAD** Clifford, Benji and Joel Madden, John Feldmann and Irwin (from left) in 2015. "Good Charlotte are why I wanted to be in a band," says Hemmings.

> Hood - who was serious enough about soccer to have visited Brazil for a training camp - and Clifford joined the action. The trio would crowd around the camera and croon Chris Brown and Bieber's "Next to You", which scored 600,000 views. They had easy banter with one another and online fans: "Go subscribe and like and all that shit," Clifford would say. "We noticed what people liked about us," says Hemmings. "We weren't idiots. We were just kind of being dicks on camera and people would like it."

> "They had this nervous energy," says their first manager, Adam Wilkinson,

who met them when the three toured Studio 301, one of Sydney's biggest recording studios, in the spring of 2011. That December, they booked their first show at a local venue called the Annandale Hotel. They needed a drummer and reached out to Irwin, one half of a local acoustic pop group. The band says that only 12 people showed up to the gig.

There was a much bigger audience on the Internet," says Irwin. "No one gave a damn where we were from. But people online in Norway and Sweden were watching it and saying, 'That's cool.'"

After meeting with the band and Hemmings' mum, Wilkinson wrote up a 12-month plan for 5SOS to become a pop juggernaut. He starts reading a marketing strategy he presented to the band: "Musically, 5SOS can occupy the space between One Direction and [guitar-playing U.K. boy band] McFly. They are young, attractive, attainable teenagers that have a cheekier edge and play their own instruments. While they cannot cross into the realm of pop punk, they can stand on the sidelines and capture the end of that market."

"They always wanted to be Blink 182 or Good Charlotte, but I'll be the first to admit I thought that was shooting too far," says Wilkinson. "We tried to make them a little more pop."

Like the Fab Four, each 5SOS member would have a simple persona. Luke was the quiet one. "The idea was to make the fans feel a little bit of mystery around him," says Wilkinson. "Michael from Day One wanted to be a rock star. So we tried to accentuate that. Calum was al-

ways supposed to be the creative one. Ashton was the serious one." Wilkinson would hassle the boys to tweet to their fans: "I'd be checking their Twitter - 'Well, guys, Ashton's done this, why the fuck haven't you done it?' 'Oh, sorry, forgot. At school, got busy."

In May 2012, the band went on tour for the first time, a three-city run of 200-capacity clubs, which Wilkinson says all sold out in under two minutes. "I still can't figure out how it blew up so quickly," he says. "Within three months, these guys went from nothing to selling out shows in three cities that a lot

A 500 1500

The stakes got higher when the band drew the interest of Modest Management, the London company that handles One Direction. Modest's co-founder, Richard Griffiths, flew to Australia to persuade 5SOS to move to London. The band arrived in the U.K. in December 2012, a month after One Direction's Louis Tomlinson had tweeted a You-Tube link to 5 Seconds of Summer's early original song, "Gotta Get Out". "Been a fan of this band for a while, everyone get behind them," he said.

Support like that didn't come free: According to reports, One Direction own a 50 per cent share in 5SOS LLP, giving them a cut of the band's music and merchandise profits.

Within months of the tweet, One Direction announced that 5SOS would open for them on their arena tour; after fewer than two dozen shows, 5SOS were playing the O2 Arena. When they landed in Miami for a tour stop, 200 girls were waiting for them outside the airport.

Hemmings says they took full advantage of the attention. They were wildest on their early tours, when they'd go to bars to mingle with fans after shows. "When you put four young dudes on a tour bus, playing theatres, then arenas, you're going to have sex with a lot of girls, I guess," says Hemmings. "We had a good time." Multiple girls in one night? "I feel like I shouldn't say," he says with a smirk. "You could say the possibility of that is high." Multiple girls at the same time? "The possibility is high," he says again. He cracks a devilish grin. "The possibilities are endless."

"I had all this attention from all these girls that would have never liked me in school, coming up to me and saying things, handing me numbers," says Hood. "It was like, 'Holy shit, fuck yeah!' I got a bit reckless."

In 2014, a video that Hood had Snapchatted to a girl – in which he filmed himself looking in the mirror with his penis out – surfaced online. It had actually happened a while beforehand – he could tell from his lack of tattoos. "It was kind of a blessing, in a way, because nothing that bad could actually happen to me again," he says, smoking on the porch at the band's house. "If another photo of my dick came out, it will just be, like, 'Oh! It's his dick again."



Plus, the video earned the band a lot of publicity. "Now, I'm just working on the sex tape," Hood says. "I'll call Pamela up, like, 'Hey, it's been a while. We really need to hype this band up!"

but Clifford has been the black sheep of 5SOS since the early days, when Irwin had to go over to Clifford's house to wake him up for band practice. He's a little flaky – he missed a show

in New York after losing his passport – and he's also the most accident-prone: Last November in London, he tumbled offstage in the first 10 seconds of an awards-show appearance after a botched jump, dropping into the orchestra pit. "My heel is fucked," he says. More scarily, Clifford walked into a pyrotechnic blast at Wembley Arena in June; his hair and shirt caught on fire, sending him writhing across the stage. He went to the hospital and was fine, but was terrified for a moment when he couldn't open his eyes.

On a more personal note, Clifford interrupted the set at a Michigan amphitheatre gig later that summer: "I was just fixing some problems with my mental health," he told the crowd. "I just saw a therapist real quick on the break we had."

Clifford says he suffers from issues of "self-esteem, loneliness, a bit of depression", and has been taking too many sleeping pills at night. Two weeks ago, in Amsterdam, he hit a "breaking point" and called the band's current manager, Matt Emsel. "I said, 'I'm going home, I'm done'," says Clifford. "'I'm going into hiding for, like, a month or two.'" He relent-

ed, but says, "I've been sad as hell lately." After the onstage announcement, fans tweeted Clifford encouragement with the hashtag #WeLoveYouMichael. "I've become, like, an advocate for mental health, you know?" he says, a little uncomfortable with the role. Irwin is protective of Clifford, saying that he was concerned the guitarist's struggles were going to be "taken as some bullshit marketing thing".

Irwin was happy to see Clifford smiling when his mum visited him on the road recently. "Michael loves home," says Irwin. "He loves being at home with his fucking computer. That's where we picked him up from and that's where we have to drop him back. You know what I mean? Michael, if you'll just leave your computer for a couple of years, and we'll drop you back there eventually. We just need you now for this band."

In the week before the AMAs, Clifford got upset when a skit with late-night host James Corden went south. In the sketch, Corden played the fictional fifth member of 5SOS, who comically lashed out after he was kicked out of the group. But at the taping, the band kept stepping on Corden's lines, and the host got annoyed. His jokes at the band's expense seemed to get harsher, and he singled out Clifford: "I can find a dickhead with red hair seven days a week! You think you're the first guy to dye your hair and be in a band? You're like a cliché of every shit musician."

Clifford was a little shaken afterward. "That was really weird," he says, walking to a nearby supermarket. "That was the hardest promo I've ever done." (The meanest lines end up getting cut from

**小家园建筑** 

Wilkinson attributes Irwin's drive to his tough childhood. His father left his family when Irwin was two; Irwin helped his mother raise his younger brother and sister, who had a different father. "She's had times where she's been depressed and drank too much, and that was hard for me," he says. Irwin was the only band member to graduate from high school before leaving for England; he was a star swimmer and class vice president, and he took acting classes on the side. And though he had a hard time leaving his siblings when 5SOS left Sydney, Irwin knew he couldn't pass up the opportunity. "I think I was in a different place," he says. "For me, my life was a lot more stressful at home.

"I'm not withheld by my past," he adds. "I'm an adult." He works out daily ("I look up to Sting and Springsteen – they are fucking fit and terrific onstage") and takes pains to connect with music-industry folks, gravitating after AMA's rehearsal to speak to some guys standing near the soundboard. "Those are the same people who do Dick Clark's New Year's Eve show," he says. "One day, you will be fucking 60 on the charts and will need to ask them for a favour, and those are the people that will help you out. It's important."

Clifford and Irwin clash over creative differences. "There have been times when I'm like, 'Fuck, why are we fighting so much?'" says Clifford. Clifford tends to write dark, heavier songs like "Jet Black Heart". Irwin leans more commercial. He pushed for their first big single "She Looks So Perfect" (with the chorus "You look so perfect standing there/In my American Apparel underwear"). Irwin excitedly tells the story of the lyric: Their co-writer's girlfriend forgot her underwear once, so she wore his. "We're like, 'That's fucking cool'," says Irwin. "It hit me straight away. I loved it because it was quirky. I knew it was gonna break us. Michael hated it."

"I worry about my band," he adds. "I fucking worry about them. Every now and then, someone will experience a heartbreak and feel depressed and feel crazy and party every day. I want them to get through it. We have to make it work."

o far, it's working. Today, the band is crowded onto a couch, wearing funny top hats, answering questions at a taping of Ryan Seacrest's *New Year's Rockin' Eve.* A blonde reporter in a sparkly dress asks

what lessons they've learned this year. "Watch where you're going," Irwin says. "And watch where Michael's going."

### POP PUNK'S SEGOND ACT

Warped Tour reunion time! 5SOS have helped breathe life into these 2000s-era post-Green Day acts



#### **GOOD CHARLOTTE**



The Madden brothers were the first concert for Luke Hemmings of 5SOS, and now he's writing

with them. "There's no guidebook for how to be a pop band playing arenas," he says. "The best we have is talking to them."

#### **ALL TIME LOW**

In the band's early days (which were, OK, four years ago), Clifford made a ritual of watching this pop-emo band's film *Straight to DVD*. "They started as a Blink-182 cover band – we found Blink by backtracking," he says.

SUM 41

Michael Clifford
has called this
L.A. band's "In
Too Deep" the
perfect poppunk song. Adds
Hemmings, "We
took a lot from them
onstage – jumping in
the air, playing half-time."

#### **GOLDFINGER**

As a kid, Hemmings listened to "Superman" – the classic cut by these L.A. skapunkers in Tony Hawk's Pro Skater – and now Goldfinger's John Feldmann is 5SOS' mentor and producer. "He really changed our career," says Hemmings.



Clifford is sluggish and a little sour; he was out late partying with Twenty One Pilots' Josh Dun, bequeather of the Fleshlight. Clifford rallies as 5SOS knock out their snarly singles "Hey Everybody!" and "She's Kinda Hot", but afterward, with the crowd still cheering, he darts offstage and storms down a backstage hallway to the dressing room. "Are you all right?" says one of the band's managers, putting his arm around him.

The bandmates stop for a brief photo shoot, making their best punk faces – Hemmings sticks out his tongue, Irwin grimaces, Hood puts a confetti gun on his crotch and shoots it off. Clifford squints and raises his eyebrows. But he looks miserable.

Clifford's mood brightens later in the dressing room when Irwin presents him with a birthday gift from the band, which Irwin had been planning for months: two black custom-made Gibson Les Paul Junior guitars. "Holy fuck!" says Clifford, opening the first case, putting his hands over his face. When he sees the second guitar, he screams: "This is the best day of my life! Oh, my God! Holy fucking shit! This is literally the last fucking thing I expected!" He gives Irwin a huge hug.

In 2016, the band plan to live in separate places: Hemmings and Clifford will be sharing one home, and Hood and Irwin the other. "Eventually, we're going to get to an age where we can't be around each other 24/7," says Clifford.

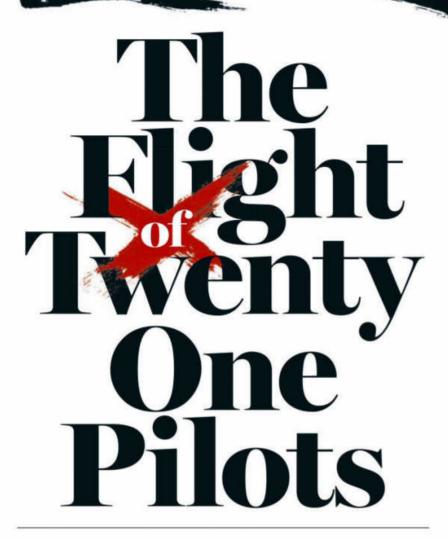
But they seem to realise that being a band is what sets them apart from almost everyone else at their level, and they want to hold on to that. They feel sorry for solo pop stars hunkered down with paid helpers at awards shows. "No one's fucking friends," says Irwin. Despite any tensions, they are going on vacation together in Indonesia over the holiday break. "You need to work on the band's relationship, just like a romantic relationship," says Irwin.

Clifford's favourite band moment last year did not happen onstage, or when they were getting chased, or when their record went to Number One. It was in Milan, when 5SOS asked for five minutes alone during a tour stop, away from its entourage. That's when Hood started climbing out a window, into the parking lot. The others followed.

"We were like, 'Holy shit, this is going to be the greatest prank ever'," says Clifford. "We shut the window and jumped out and hid in the parking lot, and watched our managers go in the room.

"They opened the door and were like, 'Where did the guys go?'" he continues. "They went in the bathroom, the whole thing. They started freaking out. 'Holy shit, they're all gone."

"We could have ran," says Clifford, smiling. "We could have ran far away."



Why is the biggest new band of the past year so stressed out?

**By Andy Greene** 



HEN TWENTY ONE PILOTS FRONTMAN TYLER Joseph scrolls through his phone, there are hundreds of names in the contacts he doesn't quite recognise: kids from the band's hometown of Columbus, Ohio, who were the earliest fans of his two-man group, from back in

the days when Joseph used to drive door-to-door hand-delivering tickets for club shows. When that grew too time-consuming, he and drummer Josh Dun would have fans meet them at a table outside the Chick fil-A in the Polaris mall's food court. On show



Joseph (right, with Dun) says his black makeup represents his insecurities. 

days, Joseph's mum would stand outside the club and try to hawk tickets to passing Ohio State students. "She'd be like, 'Come see my son play music'," recalls Joseph, who's 27 but could pass for a teenager, with a puppyish, Joseph Gordon-Levitt vibe that turns into something stranger and more intense onstage.

That was just four years ago. The duo's grassroots approach has, to their surprise, propelled them way, way beyond central Ohio. They are easily the biggest group to break out in the past year: In mid-January, Twenty One Pilots had a Top 10 single ("Stressed Out") in America and the country's Number Three album, lodged between Justin Bieber and One Direction. Weeks ago, they announced a 58-date U.S. arena tour, including two nearly sold-out shows at Madison Square Garden.

They're signed to the punk-leaning label Fueled by Ramen - launching pad for Fall Out Boy and Paramore - but Twenty One Pilots are one of the hardest-to-categorise hit acts in years, mixing angsty lyrics, Macklemore-style rhymes, Ben Folds-like piano pop, 311-ish reggae beats, hard-rock energy and the occasional ukulele ballad. Onstage, Joseph plays bass, piano and uke when he's not stalking around in smeared makeup and a bondage mask. Dun, a chilled-out former skater with an easy grin and gauges in his ears, helps them sound like a band, triggering prerecorded backing tracks as he plays. It's a seemingly odd combination that makes total sense to their teen fan base. "There was a lot of pressure to find a genre and stick to it," says Joseph. "People would tell me all the time, 'You can't be all things to everyone.' I would say, 'I'm not trying to be! I'm being what I want to be for myself."

Their current hit, the rap-rock throwback "Stressed Out", is about the harsh end of adolescence ("Used to dream of outer space, but now they're laughing at our face/Saying, 'Wake up, you need to make money'"). And backstage at *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* the week before Christmas, Joseph is doing his best to live like a kid again, gleefully flying down the quiet halls on his brandnew hoverboard, past uniformed NBC pages and frowning security guards. "How do I go forward?" he asks. "I just push my wiener out? I guess it just reads the ween!"

As showtime approaches, Joseph begins to transform, slathering black grease paint all over his neck and arms and trading his T-shirt and jeans for a stylish long black coat and dark pants. He stands up from the couch and begins pacing back and forth. "This makeup forces me to recognise what I'm trying to say on this stage with this song," he says. "I'm anxious to get up there and get this over with."

Associate editor Andy Greene interviewed Pete Townshend in RS 763.

They play the album track "Heavydirty-soul": Like most songs on their newest album, *Blurryface*, it delves deep into Joseph's insecurities. "There's an infestation in my mind's imagination," he speed-raps. Fallon is sitting in darkness at his desk, but he's banging his head along to the beat; Questlove is also impressed, tweeting later in the day, "Whoa...I wasn't ready!!!"

Joseph and Dun emerge from behind a red curtain into the *Tonight Show* hallway as Joseph's slim blonde wife of nine months, Jenna, and members of their management team and road crew burst into applause. "Well," Joseph says, breathing heavily, "that was four minutes of hard work."

HE NAME TWENTY ONE PIlots is also a philosophy for Joseph and Dun: It came from an Arthur Miller play, All My Sons, that Joseph was reading at Ohio State, about a war contractor who knowingly sends off faulty airplane parts to Europe during World

"I'd hide Green Day albums under my bed," says Dun of his conservative Christian upbringing.

War II, afraid that he'd lose money if he fessed up to the mistake; the decision results in the death of 21 airplane pilots. It resonated with Joseph, who declined a basketball scholarship from Otterbein University to focus on music. "I could relate to the fact that making the right decision in life sometimes takes more work," says Joseph. "It takes more time, and it can feel like you're going backward."

To this day, Joseph and Dun will warn each other that they are "sending out the parts" if they feel they're taking the easy route. As the duo grew more popular, they turned down record deals with signing bonuses, acted as their own roadies long after they were selling out large venues, and refused to trade in their van for a touring bus. More recently, they've declined significant sponsorship offers for their 2016 tour.

Joseph and Dun were both raised in conservative, religious households. Joseph's father was the principal of a Christian high school that Tyler attended; before that, he was home-schooled by his mother. "I told her I wanted to be a basketball player, and she made me take 500 shots every single day in the backyard," he says. "If I got closer to the basket and made layups, she didn't count them. She'd knock on the back window near the kitchen and point to the three-point line. I had to be done before dinner, and if I wasn't, I wasn't allowed to eat."

Things were even stricter at the Dun household. Video games and most rock or hip-hop albums were banned. "I'd hide albums like Green Day's Dookie under my bed," Dun says. "Sometimes they'd find them and get real mad. They'd find a Christian alternative, like Relient K, and make me listen to that." For a while, the only movies allowed in the house came from CleanFlicks, a Christian company that took Hollywood movies and edited out all the profanity, sexuality and violence. For a young Dun, it made watching movies like The Terminator quite confusing. "Some scenes they'd remove entirely," he says. "Watching those movies was an absolutely awful experience."

By the time he was a teenager, Dun was rebelling hard. "I just had this aggression," he says, noting that his parents nearly kicked him out when he was 14. "They almost sent me to a military school. They didn't know what to do with me, and I was always in detention. I never got into drugs or alcohol, but I would yell at my parents and just treat them terribly. Everything was an argument. Looking back, they were trying their best."

When his parents fell asleep, he'd break out his punk-pop CDs; eventually, they softened up on rock music, allowing him to assemble a drum kit in his basement piece by piece with his own money. He didn't go to college, moving in with a bunch of buddies instead and playing in local bands while scraping by working in the drum department of Guitar Center. "I was going nowhere," he says. "One day I said to my dad, 'Are you disappointed that I'm working a minimum-wage job and I didn't go to college?' I'll never forget his response. He said, 'It's not about how much money you make or what your job is, but it's more about your character. For that, I'm proud of you.' It gave me motivation."

osh, I have a question for you," Joseph says. "Would you rather be attacked by 100 chicken-sized horses or one horse-sized chicken?"

Dun gives the question (inspired by a popular Internet meme) some thought. "There's pros and cons to both," he says. "A horse-sized chicken will have short legs, so I don't know how fast it would be."

Joseph disagrees. "Take how fast a regular chicken is, and times it by however big a horse is. You want to take the 100 chick-



en-sized horses all day long. You just kick them right in the snout. Dude, just picture the beak on a horse-sized chicken. And he's not just roaming around. He's, like, honed in on you."

It's a freezing-cold afternoon in Ohio a couple of days before New Year's, and Joseph and Dun are walking around a nearly deserted downtown Columbus, not far from where they first met in 2010. Joseph had taught himself piano by playing along to Beatles and Dion songs on the radio, impressing friends with how quickly he learned, and forming an early version of Twenty One Pilots with two friends. Dun first saw them at a club on the Ohio State campus. "I loved everything about the show except for one thing: I wasn't onstage playing also," he says. It would be another year before Joseph's original drummer quit and Dun got the job, but they had become best friends in the meantime. By 2012, Joseph had grown into a ferocious performer, climbing the scaffolding and diving into audiences. The duo became the biggest band in central Ohio, putting every spare penny into the band and focusing intensely on their local fans. The most important Columbus promoter, Adam Vanchoff, took notice when they played the 1,700-seat Newport Music Hall. "I was like, 'These local guys just sold out the Newport?" says Vanchoff. "Nationally touring bands can't do that!"

Right now, Joseph and Dun are enjoying their first month off since their majorlabel debut came out in early 2013. They've spent the time hanging out with their families and old friends, but they've also logged many hours working on complex

HANDS ON

Joseph onstage at the Forum in California in December.

backing tracks for their upcoming arena tour. "I know that concept gets a lot of flak," says Joseph of the tracks. "But we're so proud of them – we slave over them."

They head to Dun's parents' house; the drummer now lives in L.A. but crashes in his old bedroom when he's in Ohio, which is often. (Joseph and Jenna bought a house in Columbus and live there full-time.) They filmed much of the "Stressed Out" video at Dun's childhood home, so it's become a destination for Twenty One Pilots fans. Because the home number is listed, Dun says his parents have had to cancel the landline to put an end to the calls coming in at all hours.

A Christmas tree sits in the living room, next to a ceramic Nativity scene. There's not a single Twenty One Pilots photo or bit of memorabilia anywhere within sight, though the walls are covered with signs that say things like Joy and a Loving family mine to treasure better than wealth of any measure. Dun's basement bedroom has been stripped of most personal artifacts, but his decent-size DVD collection – which includes movies certain to be approved by CleanFlicks like Finding Nemo and The Truman Show – remains intact.

Dun takes out a bowl of two-day-old chili from the fridge, mixing in sour cream and cheese as the topic turns to his own religious views. "We're always questioning things," he says, "but I guess it's safe to say that we're both Christians." Dun's mother,

Laura, a small, cheerful blonde woman in her fifties, comes downstairs to say hello; she is a nurse, and his father is a physical therapist. "Hey, Mrs. Dun," Joseph says. "This is good chili. I promise to not spill any on the couch."

"Call me Mama Dun," she says. "I would have fixed you something more if I knew you were coming over."

Mama Dun appears in the "Stressed Out" video along with all the other members of the combined Joseph and Dun clans, who all chant "Wake up, you need to make money" in unison. "Growing up, money is important," says Joseph. "And now I have a career where I'm making enough money to live. But I really want to give it to my parents, my family, charities and people around me." True to form, Joseph still drives around town in a beat-up Chevy Impala. In the coming months, he says that the band plans to start its own charity, something "Columbus-based".

The rise of Twenty One Pilots also means that the band has stopped apologising for its unorthodox mix of styles. The follow-up single to "Stressed Out" was "Lane Boy", a reggae-infused track that is almost a mission statement, with Joseph singing, "They say, 'Stay in your lane, boy'/ But we go where we want to."

"It is true that if you hear our music described, it sounds unappealing," says Joseph as he gets ready to leave for his brother's high school basketball game. "I used to laugh and agree with people when they said it didn't make any sense.

"I'm going to stop saying that," he says.
"It fits together into one body of work, because we made it."

## **ROLLING STONE EXCLUSIVE**

# EL CHAP

# A SECRET VISIT WITH THE MOST WANTED MAN IN THE WORLD

## **BY SEAN PENN**

"The laws of conscience, which we pretend to be derived from nature, proceed from custom." —Montaigne

T'S SEPTEMBER 28TH, 2015. MY HEAD IS swimming, labelling TracPhones (burners), one per contact, one per day, destroy, burn, buy, balancing levels of encryption, mirroring through Blackphones, anonymous e-mail addresses, unsent messages accessed in draft form. It's a clandestine horror show for the single most technologically illiterate man left standing. At 55 years old, I've never learned to use a laptop. Do they still make laptops? No fucking idea! It's 4:00 in the afternoon. Another gorgeous fall day in New York City. The streets are abuzz with the lights and sirens of diplomatic movement, heads of state, U.N. officials, Secret Service details, the NYPD. It's the week of the U.N. General Assembly. Pope Francis blazed a trail and left town two days before. I'm sitting in my room at the St. Regis Hotel with my colleague and brother in arms, Espinoza.

#### **EDITOR'S NOTE**

As ROLLING STONE went to press, El Chapo Guzmán was arrested in Los Mochis, Sinaloa.

Disclosure: Some names have had to be changed, locations not named, and an understanding was brokered with the subject that this piece would be submitted for the subject's approval before publication. The subject did not ask for any changes.

Espinoza and I have travelled many roads together, but none as unpredictable as the one we are now approaching. Espinoza is the owl who flies among falcons. Whether he's standing in the midst of a slum, a jungle or a battlefield, his idiosyncratic elegance, mischievous smile and self-effacing charm have a way of defusing threat. His bald head demands your attention to his twinkling eyes. He's a man fascinated and engaged. We whisper to each other in code. Finally a respite from the cyber technology that's been sizzling my brain and soul. We sit within quietude of fortified walls that are old New York hotel construction, when walls were walls, and telephones were usable without a Ph.D. We quietly make our plans, sensitive to the paradox that also in our hotel is President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico. Espinoza and I leave the room to get outside the hotel, breathe in the fall air and walk the five blocks to a Japanese restaurant, where we'll meet up with our colleague El Alto Garcia. As we exit onto 55th Street, the sidewalk is lined with the armoured SUVs that will transport the president of Mexico to the

# SPEAKS

THE OUTLAW Joaquín Archivaldo Guzmán Loera. El Chapo, in a video interview he sent from an undisclosed location

General Assembly. Paradoxical indeed, as one among his detail asks if I will take a selfie with him. Flash frame: myself and a six-foot, ear-pieced Mexican security operator.

Flash frame: Why is this a paradox? It's paradoxical because today's Mexico has, in effect, two presidents. And among those two presidents, it is not Peña Nieto who Espinoza and I were planning to see as we'd spoken in whispered code upstairs. It is not he who necessitated weeks of clandestine planning. Instead, it's a man of about my age, though absent any human calculus that may provide us a sense of anchored commonality. At four years old, in '64, I was digging for imaginary treasures, unneeded, in my parents' middleclass American backyard while he was hand-drawing fantasy pesos that, if real, might be the only path for he and his family to dream beyond peasant farming. And while I was surfing the waves of Malibu at age nine, he was already working in the marijuana and poppy fields of the remote mountains of Sinaloa, Mexico. Today, he runs the biggest international drug cartel the world has ever known, exceeding even that of Pablo Escobar. He shops and ships

by some estimates more than half of all the cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and marijuana that come into the United States.

They call him El Chapo. Or "Shorty". Joaquín Archivaldo Guzmán Loera. The same El Chapo Guzman who only

two months earlier had humiliated the Peña Nieto government and stunned the world with his extraordinary escape from Altiplano maximum-security prison through an impeccably engineered milelong tunnel.

This would be the second prison escape of the world's most notorious drug lord, the first being 13 years earlier, from Pu-

#### **ELCHAPO SPEAKS**

ente Grande prison, where he was smuggled out under the sheets of a laundry cart. Since he joined the drug trade as a teenager, Chapo swiftly rose through the ranks, building an almost mythic reputation: First, as a cold pragmatist known to deliver a single shot to the head for any mistakes made in a shipment, and later, as he began to establish the Sinaloa cartel, as a Robin Hood-like figure who provided much-needed services in the Sinaloa mountains, funding everything from food and roads to medical relief. By the time of his second escape from federal prison, he had become a figure entrenched in Mexican folklore.

In 1989, El Chapo dug the first subterranean passage beneath the border from Tijuana to San Diego, and pioneered the use of tunnels to transport his products and to evade capture. I will discover that his already accomplished engineers had been flown to Germany last year those beheaded, exploded, dismembered or bullet-riddled innocents, activists, courageous journalists and cartel enemies alike. I was highly aware of committed DEA and other law-enforcement officers and soldiers, both Mexican and American, who had lost their lives executing the policies of the War on Drugs. The families decimated, and institutions corrupted.

I took some comfort in a unique aspect of El Chapo's reputation among the heads of drug cartels in Mexico: that, unlike many of his counterparts who engage in gratuitous kidnapping and murder, El Chapo is a businessman first, and only resorts to violence when he deems it advantageous to himself or his business interests. It was on the strength of the Sinaloa cartel's seemingly more calculated strategies (a cartel whose famous face is El Chapo, but also includes the co-leadership of Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada) that Sinaloa had become dominant among

dicted Americans, barbarically imprisoned for the crime of their illness? Locked down in facilities where unspeakable acts of dehumanisation and violence are inescapable, and murder a looming threat. Are we saying that what's systemic in our culture, and out of our direct hands and view, shares no moral equivalency to those abominations that may rival narco assassinations in Juarez? Or, is that a distinction for the passive self-righteous?

There is little dispute that the War on Drugs has failed: as many as 27,000 drugrelated homicides in Mexico alone in a single year, and opiate addiction on the rise in the U.S. Working in the emergency and development field in Haiti, I have countless times been proposed theoretical solutions to that country's ailments by bureaucratic agencies unfamiliar with the culture and incongruities on the ground. Perhaps in the tunnel vision of our puritanical and prosecutorial culture that has designed the War on Drugs, we have similarly lost sight of practice, and given over our souls to theory. At an American taxpayer cost of \$25 billion per year, this war's policies have significantly served to kill our children, drain our economies, overwhelm our cops and courts, pick our pockets, crowd our prisons and punch the clock. Another day's fight is lost. And lost with it, any possible vision of reform, or recognition of the proven benefits in so many other countries achieved through the regulated legalisation of recreational drugs.

Now on 50th Street, Espinoza and I enter the Japanese restaurant. El Alto sits alone in a quiet corner, beneath a slow-turning ceiling fan that circulates the scent of raw fish. He's a big man, quiet and graceful, rarely speaking above a whisper. He'd been helpful to me on many previous excursions. He's worldly, well connected and liked. Espinoza, speaking in Spanish, fills him in on our plans and itinerary. El Alto listens intently, squeezing edamame beans one at a time between his teeth. We considered this meeting our point of no return. We were either all in, or we would abandon the journey. We had weighed the risks, but I felt confident and said so. I'd offered myself to experiences beyond my control in numerous countries of war, terror, corruption and disaster. Places where what can go wrong will go wrong, had gone wrong, and yet in the end, had delivered me in one piece with a deepening situational awareness (though not a perfect science) of available cautions within the design in chaos.

It was agreed that I would go to L.A. the next day to coordinate with our principal point of contact to El Chapo. We ordered sake and indulged the kind of operating-room humour that might displace our imperfectly scientific concerns. Outside the

## FOR THE JOURNEY, WE PUT OUR LIVES IN THE HANDS OF THE SINALOA CARTEL TO GET THE FIRST INTERVIEW EL CHAPO HAD EVER GRANTED.

for three months of extensive additional training necessary to deal with the low-lying water table beneath the prison. A tunnel equipped with a pipe-track-guided motorcycle with an engine modified to function in the minimally oxygenised space, allowing El Chapo to drop through a hole in his cell's shower floor, into its saddle and ride to freedom. It was *this* president of Mexico who had agreed to see us.

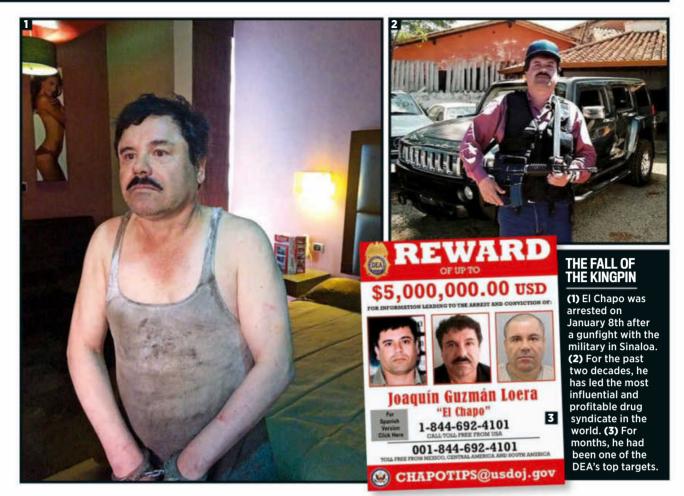
I take no pride in keeping secrets that may be perceived as protecting criminals, nor do I have any gloating arrogance at posing for selfies with unknowing security men. But I'm in my rhythm. Everything I say to everyone must be true. As true as it is compartmentalised. The trust that El Chapo had extended to us was not to be fucked with. This will be the first interview El Chapo had ever granted outside an interrogation room, leaving me no precedent by which to measure the hazards. I'd seen plenty of video and graphic photography of

Actor, writer and director Sean Penn has written from the front lines in Haiti, Iraq, Iran, Venezuela and Cuba. He wishes to dedicate this article to the parents of slain Chicago youth, and to Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, public servant, father and hero.

Mexico's criminal syndicates, extending far beyond the rural northwestern state, with significant inroads to all principal border areas between the United States and Mexico – Juarez, Mexicali, Tijuana, and reaching as far as Los Cabos.

S AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, I'M drawn to explore what may be inconsistent with the portrayals our government and media brand upon their declared enemies. Not since Osama bin Laden has the pursuit of a fugitive so occupied the public imagination. But unlike bin Laden, who had posed the ludicrous premise that a country's entire population is defined by - and therefore complicit in - its leadership's policies, with the world's most wanted drug lord, are we, the American public, not indeed complicit in what we demonise? We are the consumers, and as such, we are complicit in every murder, and in every corruption of an institution's ability to protect the quality of life for citizens of Mexico and the United States that comes as a result of our insatiable appetite for il-

As much as anything, it's a question of relative morality. What of the tens of thousands of sick and suffering chemically ad-



restaurant windows, a chanting march of Mexican-Americans flowed by in protest against the Peña Nieto government's asserted violations of human rights, having allowed their country of origin to fall prey to a narco regime.

In January 2012, the Mexican film and television star Kate del Castillo, who famously played a drug lordess in Mexico's popular soap opera La Reina del Sur, used Twitter to express her mistrust of the Mexican government. She stated that in a question of trust between governments and cartels, hers would go to El Chapo. And in that tweet, she expressed a dream, perhaps an encouragement to El Chapo himself: "Mr. Chapo, wouldn't it be cool that you started trafficking with love? With cures for diseases, with food for the homeless children, with alcohol for the retirement homes that don't let the elderly spend the rest of the days doing whatever the fuck they want. Imagine trafficking with corrupt politicians instead of women and children who end up as slaves. Why don't you burn all those whorehouses where women are worth less than a pack of cigarettes. Without offer, there's no demand. Come on, Don! You would be the hero of heroes. Let's traffic with love. You know how to. Life is a business and the only thing that changes is the merchandise. Don't you agree?" While she was ostracised by many, Kate's sentiment is widely shared in Mexico. It can be heard in the narco corrido ballads so popular throughout the country. But her views, unlike those folkloric lionisations, are rather a continuity of her history of brave expression and optimistic dreams for her homeland. She had been outspoken on politics, sex and religion and is among the courageous independent spirits that democracies are built to protect and cannot exist without.

Her courage is further demonstrated in her willingness to be named in this article. There are both brutal and corrupt forces within the Mexican government who oppose her (and indeed, according to Kate, high-ranking officials have responded to her public statement with private intimidations), and hence, a responsibility of the greater public to shepherd those who make their voices heard.

It perhaps should have come as no surprise that this homegrown icon of entertainment would catch the interest of a singular fan and fugitive from Sinaloa. After reading Kate's statement on Twitter, a lawyer representing El Chapo Guzmán contacted Kate. He said El Señor wanted to send her flowers in gratitude. She ner-

vously offered her address, but with the gypsy movements of an actress, the flowers did not find her.

Two years later, in February 2014, a detachment of Mexican marines captured El Chapo in a Mazatlán hotel following a 13-year manhunt. The images of that arrest were flashed across the world's televisions. While he was incarcerated at Altiplano prison, El Chapo's attorneys were flooded with overtures from Hollywood studios. With his dramatic capture, and, perhaps, the illusion of safe dealings now that El Chapo was locked up, the gringos were scrambling to tell his story. The seed was planted, and El Chapo, awakened to the prospect, made plans of his own. He was interested in seeing the story of his life told on film, but would entrust its telling only to Kate. The same lawyer again tracked her down, this time through the Mexican equivalent of the Screen Actors Guild, and the imprisoned drug lord and the actress began to correspond in handwritten letters and BBM messages.

It was at a social event in Los Angeles when Kate met Espinoza. She learned he was well connected to financial sources, including those that funded film projects, and she proposed a partnership to make a film about El Chapo. This was when Espi-

noza included our mutual colleague and friend El Alto. I learned of their intention to make the film, but I did not know Kate or have any involvement with the project. The three of them met with El Chapo's lawyer to explore their approach, but it was ultimately determined that direct access to El Chapo would still be too restricted for their authorised pursuit to rise above competitive "Chapo" projects that Hollywood would pursue with or without his participation.

Then came July 2015. El Chapo's prison break. The world, and particularly Mexico and the United States, was up in arms. How could this happen?! The DEA and the Justice Department were furious. The fact that Mexican Interior Secretary Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong had refused El Chapo's extradition to the United States, then allowed his escape, positioned Chong and the Peña Nieto administration as global pariahs.

I followed the news of El Chapo's escape and reached out to Espinoza. We met in the courtyard of a boutique hotel in Paris in late August. He told me about Kate and that she had been intermittently receiving contact from Chapo even after the escape. It was then that I posed the idea of a magazine story. Espinoza's smile of mischief arose, indicating he would arrange for me to meet Kate back in Los Angeles. At a Santa Monica restaurant, I made my case, and Kate agreed to make the bridge, sending our names for vetting across the border. When word came back a week or so later that Chapo had indeed agreed to meet with us, I called Jann Wenner at Rolling Stone. Myself, Espinoza and El Alto were given the assignment. And with a letter from Jann officiating it, we would join Kate, who was our ticket to El Chapo's trust, then put ourselves in the hands of representatives of the Sinaloa cartel to coordinate our journey. It had been a month in the planning by the time Espinoza and I were breathing the New York air that late-September day on 55th Street.

OUR DAYS LATER, ON OCTOBER 2nd, El Alto, Espinoza, Kate and I board a self-financed charter flight from a Los Angeles-area airport to a city in mid-Mexico. Upon landing, a hotel driver takes us by minivan to the hotel we had been instructed to book. Suspicious of every living or inanimate thing, I scan cars and drivers, mothers papoosing infants, grandmothers, peasants on the street, building tops, curtained windows. I search the skies for helicopters. There is no question in my mind but that the DEA and the Mexican government are tracking our movements. From the moment Kate had gone out on a limb with her tweet of January 2012 through the begin-





#### THE SINALOA CONNECTION

Chapo's massive drug production includes (1) the cultivation of poppy and marijuana. (2) Since October, numerous checkpoints had been set up to try to catch the elusive kingpin. (3) El Chapo supporters protest against his incarceration in 2014.



ning of our encrypted negotiations to meet El Chapo, I had been bewildered by his willingness to risk our visit. If Kate was being surveilled, so must those named on any shared flight manifest. I see no spying eyes, but I assume they are there.

Through the windshield as we approach the hotel, I see a casually dressed man in his forties appear on the sidewalk, simultaneously directing our driver to the entryway while dialing a number on his cellphone. This is Alonzo, who, I'm about to learn, is an associate of El Chapo. We grab our bags and exit the minivan. Almost immediately, the traffic around the designated pickup point diminishes. Out of my view, someone is blocking the neighbouring streets. Then, a lone convoy of "up-armour" SUVs appears in front of our hotel. Alonzo asks us to surrender our electronics and leave them behind – cellphones, computers, etc. I had left mine in Los Angeles, anticipating this requirement. My colleagues surrender theirs to

the hotel desk. We are whisked into the vehicles. Alonzo rides shotgun, my colleagues and I in the back. Alonzo and the driver are speaking quick and quiet Spanish. My own Spanish is weak at best. By day, and put on the spot, I'm pretty restricted to hola and adios. By night, with perhaps a few beers, I can get by, speaking and listening slowly. The conversation in the front seat seems unthreatening, just a cooperative exchange of logistics in the facilitation of our journey. Throughout the hour-and-a-half drive away from the city and across farmlands, both men receive frequent BBM messages - perhaps updates on our route to keep our convoy safe. With each message received, the needle on the speedometer rises; we are cruising at well over 100 miles per hour. I like speed. But not without my own hands on the wheel. To calm myself, I pretend I have any reason to memorise the route of our journey. It's that upon which I concentrate, and not the exchanges between the two strangers leading our pursuit.

We arrive at a dirt airfield. Security men in tailored suits stand beside two six-seat single-engine prop planes. It isn't until boarding one of the two planes that I realise that our driver had been the 29-year-old son of El Chapo, Alfredo Guzmán. He boards beside me, designated among our personal escorts to see his father. He's handsome, lean and smartly dressed, with a wristwatch that might be of more value than the money housed by the central banks of most nation-states. He's got one hell of a wristwatch.

The planes take off, and we travel a couple of hours. Two bouncing birds side by side through the thermals over the mountainous jungle. It once again occurs to me all the risks that are being taken by El Chapo in receiving us. We had not been blindfolded, and any experienced traveller might have been able to collect a series of triangulated landmarks to re-navigate the journey. But through his faith in Kate, whom he'd only ever known through letters or BBM, are we enjoying an unusual trust. I ask Alfredo how he can be sure we are not being followed or surveilled. He smiles (I note he doesn't blink much) and points out a red scrambler switch below the cockpit controls. "That switch blocks ground radar," he says. He adds that they have an inside man who provides notification when the military's high-altitude surveillance plane has been deployed. He has great confidence that there are no unwanted eyes on us. With Kate helping along in translations, we chat throughout the flight. I'm mindful not to say anything that may alienate his father's welcome before we've even arrived.

It's been about two hours of flight, when we descend from above the lush peaks to-

ward a sea-level field. The pilot, using his encrypted cellphone, talks to the ground. I sense that the military is beefing up operations in its search area. Our original landing zone has suddenly been deemed insecure. After quite a bit of chatter from ground to air, and some unnervingly lowaltitude circling, we find an alternate dirt patch where two SUVs wait in the shade of an adjacent tree line, and land. The flight had been just bumpy enough that each of us had taken a few swigs off a bottle of Honor tequila, a new brand that Kate is marketing. I step from plane to earth, ever so slightly sobering my bearings, and move toward the beckoning waves of waiting drivers. I throw my satchel into the open back of one of the SUVs, and lumber over to the tree line to take a piss. Dick in hand, I do consider it among my body parts vulnerable to the knives of irrational narco types, and take a fond last look, before tucking it back into my pants.

institution. Did this mean we were nearing the man?

It was still several hours into the jungle before any sign we were getting closer. Then, strangers appear as if from nowhere, onto the dirt track, checking in with our drivers and exchanging hand radios. We move on. Small villages materialise from the jungle; protective peasant eyes relax at the wave of a familiar driver. Cellphones are of no use here, so I imagine there are radio repeaters on topographical high points facilitating their internal communications.

We'd left Los Angeles at 7 a.m. By 9 p.m. on the dash clock we arrive at a clearing where several SUVs are parked. A small crew of men hover. On a knoll above, I see a few weathered bungalows. I get out of the truck, search the faces of the crew for approval that I may walk to the trunk to secure my bag. Nods follow. I move. And, when I do...there he is. Right beside the

## AND THERE HE IS, EL CHAPO, THE FUGITIVE DRUG LORD, APPEARING REMARKABLY WELL-GROOMED AND HEALTHY FOR A MAN ON THE RUN.

Espinoza had recently undergone back surgery. He stretched, readjusted his surgical corset, exposing it. It dawns on me that one of our greeters might mistake the corset for a device that contains a wire, a chip, a tracker. With all their eyes on him, Espinoza methodically adjusts the Velcro toward his belly, slowly looks up, sharing his trademark smile with the suspicious eyes around him. Then, "Cirugia de espalda [back surgery]," he says. Situation defused.

We embark into the dense, mountainous jungle in a two-truck convoy, crossing through river after river for seven long hours. Espinoza and El Alto, with a driver in the front vehicle, myself and Kate with Alonzo and Alfredo in the rear. At times the jungle opens up to farmland, then closes again into forest. As the elevation begins to climb, road signage announces approaching townships. And then, as it seems we are at the entrance of Oz, the highest peak visibly within reach, we arrive at a military checkpoint. Two uniformed government soldiers, weapons at the ready, approach our vehicle. Alfredo lowers his passenger window; the soldiers back away, looking embarrassed, and wave us through. Wow. So it is, the power of a Guzman face. And the corruption of an

truck. The world's most famous fugitive: El Chapo. My mind is an instant flip book to the hundreds of pictures and news reports I had scoured. There is no doubt this is the real deal. He's wearing a casual patterned silk shirt, pressed black jeans, and he appears remarkably well-groomed and healthy for a man on the run. He opens Kate's door and greets her like a daughter returning from college. It seems important to him to express the warm affection in person that, until now, he'd only had occasion to communicate from afar. After greeting her, he turns to me with a hospitable smile, putting out his outstretched hand. I take it. He pulls me into a "compadre" hug, looks me in the eyes and speaks a lengthy greeting in Spanish too fast for my ears. I gather up the presence of mind to explain to him in broken Spanish that I would depend on Kate to translate as the night went on. Only then does he realise his greeting had not been understood. He jokes to his crew, laughing at his own assumption that I speak Spanish and at my momentary disorientation that I've let him go on at such length in his greeting.

We are brought up some steps to a flat area on the knoll beside the bungalows. A local family caters a buffet of tacos, enchiladas, chicken, rice, beans, fresh salsa



used cartel term describing the decimated bodies in cities like Juarez after mass narco executions. Hence, I go for the tacos. He walks us to a picnic table; we are offered drinks. We sit in the low illumination of some string lights, but the perimeter falls into abrupt darkness. I see no more than 30 or 35 people. (El Chapo later confided to El Alto that, out of sight, another hundred of his soldiers were present in the immediate area.) There are no long-barrel weapons in sight. No Danny Trejo types. My impression of his crew is more in sync with what one would imagine of students at a Mexico City university. Clean-cut, well-dressed and mannered. Not a smoker in the bunch. Only two or three of the guys wear small shoulder bags that hang low beside their waists, where I assume small arms are carried. Our host, it seems to me, is concerned that Kate, as the lone female among us, not face intimidating visions of force. This assumption would be borne out several hours later.

As we sit at the picnic table, introductions are made. To my left, Alonzo. Alonzo is, as it turns out, one among El Chapo's lawyers. When speaking of El Chapo's lawyers, it gets a little murky. During his imprisonment, the only visits allowed were with "lawyers". Evidently, some who would be more accurately described as lieutenants had been dubbed or perhaps certified by the expedition of power as part of his legal team. Alonzo visited El Chapo at Altiplano just two hours before his audacious escape. According to Alonzo, he was



#### A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

In the past decade, more than 60,000 people have died in the drug-related carnage that has swept across Mexico. Above: forensics investigate a murder at Pagayo Beach. Left: Police and loved ones discover 12 bodies in El Chaco, Sinaloa.

unaware of the escape plan. But he notes that did not spare him a brutal beating by interrogators afterward.

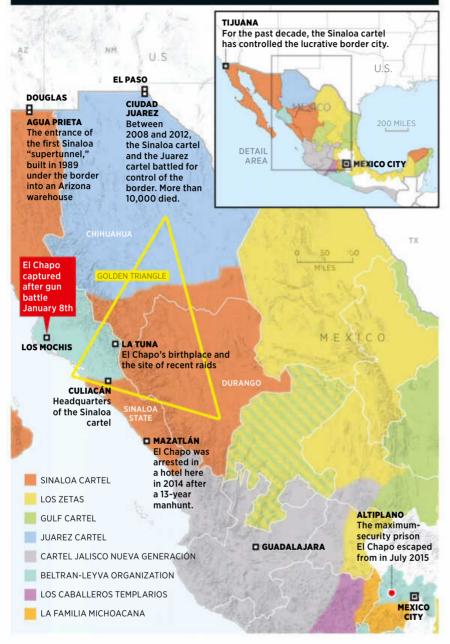
To my right, Rodrigo. Rodrigo is godfather to Chapo's twin four-year-old girls by his 26-year-old beauty-queen wife, Emma Coronel. Rodrigo is the one who has me concerned. The look in his eye is far away, but locked dead on me. My speculation goes audio. I hear chain saws. I feel splatter. I am Sean's dubitable paranoia. My eyes are compelled to drift to Rodrigo's right. There is Ivan, Chapo's eldest son. At 32, he is considered the heir to the Sinaloa cartel. He's attentive with a calm maturity. Like his brother, he boasts a fabulous wristwatch. And directly across from me, our host, with Kate to his right. Beside Alonzo, Alfredo. El Alto sits at the end of the table. Espinoza, still standing, apologises to Chapo and asks if he may lay down for an hour to rest his back. Espinoza's funny this way. It's as if we had spent these endless gruelling hours hiking a vertical volcanic summit to the cone, and now, just three steps from viewing the ring fault of the caldera, he says, "I'm gonna take a nap. I'll look into the hole later."

With Kate translating, I begin to explain my intentions. I felt increasingly that I had arrived as a curiosity to him. The lone gringo among my colleagues, who'd ridden on the coattails of El Chapo's faith in Kate. I felt his amusement as I put my cards on the table. He asks about my relationship with the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez with what seems to be a probing of my willingness to be vilified through associations.

I speak to our friendship in a way that seems to pass an intuitive litmus test measuring the independence of my perspective. I tell him, up front, that I had

#### **HOW THE CARTELS CARVE UP MEXICO**

El Chapo runs the most powerful cartel in Mexico, exporting half of the U.S.'s drugs, but he has many rivals battling for supply routes and border crossings.



a family member who worked with the Drug Enforcement Agency, that through my work in Haiti (I'm CEO of J/P HRO, a nongovernmental organisation based in Port-au-Prince) I had many relationships inside the United States government. I assure him that those relationships were by no means related to my interest in him. My only interest was to ask questions and deliver his responses, to be weighed by readers, whether in balance or contempt.

I tell him that I understood that in the mainstream narrative of narcos, the un-

dersung hypocrisy is in the complicity of buyers. I could not sell him on a bait-andswitch, and I knew that in the writing of any piece, my only genuine cards to play were to expose myself as one fascinated and willing to suspend judgment. I understood that whatever else might be said of him, it was clear to me he was not a tourist in our big world.

Throughout my introduction, Chapo smiles a warm smile. In fact, in what would be a seven-hour sit-down, I saw him without that smile only in brief flashes. As has been said of many notorious men, he

has an indisputable charisma. When I ask about his dynamic with the Mexican government, he pauses. "Talking about politicians, I keep my opinion to myself. They go do their thing and I do mine."

Beneath his smile, there is a doubtlessness to his facial expression. A question comes to mind as I observe his face. Both as he speaks as while he listens. What is it that removes all doubt from a man's eyes? Is it power? Admirable clarity? Or soullessness? Soullessness...wasn't it that that my moral conditioning was obliged to recognise in him? Wasn't it soullessness that I must perceive in him for myself to be perceived here as other than a Pollyanna? An apologist? I tried hard, folks. I really did. And reminded myself over and over of the incredible life loss, the devastation existing in all corners of the narco world. "I don't want to be portrayed as a nun," El Chapo says. Though this portrayal had not occurred to me. This simple man from a simple place, surrounded by the simple affections of his sons to their father, and his toward them, does not initially strike me as the big bad wolf of lore. His presence conjures questions of cultural complexity and context, of survivalists and capitalists, farmers and technocrats, clever entrepreneurs of every ilk, some say silver, and others lead.

A server delivers a bottle of tequila. El Chapo pours each of us three fingers. In toast, he looks to Kate. "I don't usually drink," he says, "but I want to drink with you." After a raise of the glass, I take a polite sip. He asks me if many people in the United States know about him. "Oh, yeah," I say, and inform him that the night before leaving for Mexico, I had seen that the Fusion Channel was repeating its special-edition Chasing El Chapo. He seems to delight in the absurdity of this, and as he and his cohorts share a chuckle, I look to the sky and wonder how funny it would be if there were a weaponised drone above us. We are in a clearing, sitting right out in the open. I down the tequila, and the drone goes away.

I give in to the sense of security offered by the calm of Chapo and his men. There is the pervasive feeling that if there were a threat, they would know it. We eat, drink, and talk for hours. He is interested in the movie business and how it works. He's unimpressed with its financial yield. The P&L high side doesn't add up to the downside risk for him. He suggests to us that we consider switching our career paths to the oil business. He says he would aspire to the energy sector, but that his funds, being illicit, restrict his investment opportunities. He cites (but asks me not to name in print) a host of corrupt major corporations, both within Mexico and abroad. He notes with delighted disdain several

#### **ELCHAPO SPEAKS**

through which his money has been laundered, and who take their own cynical slice of the narco pie.

"How much money will you make writing this article?" he asks. I answer that when I do journalism, I take no payment. I could see that, to him, the idea of doing any kind of work without payment is a fool's game. Unlike the gangsters we're used to, the John Gotti's who claimed to be simple businessmen hiding behind numerous international front companies, El Chapo sticks to an illicit game, proudly volunteering, "I supply more heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana than anybody else in the world. I have a fleet of submarines, airplanes, trucks and boats."

He is entirely unapologetic. Against the challenges of doing business in such a clandestine industry he has built an empire. I am reminded of press accounts alleging a hundred-million-dollar bounty the man across from me is said to have put on Donald Trump's life. I mention Trump. which is the most difficult?" Smiling, he shakes his head and says an unequivocal "None." There is no politician who could answer the same question so clearly or successfully, but then again, the challenges are quite different for a global power broker who simply removes any obstacle to "difficulties".

Having explained my intention, I ask if he would grant two days for a formal interview. My colleagues would be leaving in the morning but I offer to stay behind to record our conversations. He pauses before responding. He says, "I just met you. I will do it in eight days. Can you come back in eight days?" I say I can. I ask to take a photograph together so that I could verify to my editors at Rolling Stone that the planned meeting had taken place. "Adelante," he says. We all rise from the table as a group and follow Chapo into one of the bungalows. Once inside, we see the first sign of heavy arms. An M16 lies on a couch opposite the neutral white wall against which we would take the photograph. I

renal rush of paranoia can inspire insult or injury, Chapo has returned.

But there is a change. With Kate tucked cozily into bed, his crew and he are fast and furious into body armour, strapping long-barrel weapons and hip-clipped grenades. The battle-ready army of jungle guerrillas who had been standing down earlier in the night on her behalf are now returning to what I assume is a more typical posture. El Chapo, too, is strapped and ready to command.

Following this Clark Kent-into-Superman extravaganza, Chapo returns to the table. His demeanour, casual. His battle gear, anything but. Espinoza and El Alto share translation duties. We compare notes on cultures. We ask lighthearted questions, though the environment has gotten far less lighthearted. Despite that, I'm feeling frustrated at having to wait eight days to get him in a corner - to ask everything I think the world wants to know. I feel naked without pen and paper. So I only ask questions one couldn't forget the answers to. Did you know Pablo Escobar? Chapo answers, "Yes, I met him once at his house. Big house." He smiles. See your mother much? "All the time. I hoped we would meet at my ranch and you could meet my mother. She knows me better than I do. But something came up and we had to change the plan." I assume he was insinuating inside information that the ranch had again come under observation by authorities.

It has been several hours, and El Alto and I share a nod indicating our mutual sense: the core of soldiers around El Chapo are getting fidgety. A clock of some kind is ticking in them. It must have been about four a.m. by this time. El Chapo stands, concluding the night, thanking us for our visit. We follow him to where the family who had cooked our dinner stands dutifully behind a serving table. He takes each of them by the hand graciously; giving them thanks, and with a look, he invites us to do the same. He walks us back toward the same bungalow where he had earlier escorted Kate. In a narrow, dark passage between ours and an adjacent bungalow, Chapo puts his arm over my shoulder and renews his request that I see him in eight days. "I'll be saying goodbye now," he says. At this moment, I expel a minor traveller's flatulence (sorry), and with it, I experience the same chivalry he'd offered when putting Kate to bed, as he pretends not to notice. We escape its subtle brume, and I join my colleagues inside the bungalow. There are two beds and one couch a short distance from where Kate can be seen sleeping on a third bed behind a privacy divider. Espinoza returns to the bed he'd claimed upon our arrival.

Now it is down to El Alto and I looking at each other. His six-foot-three frame

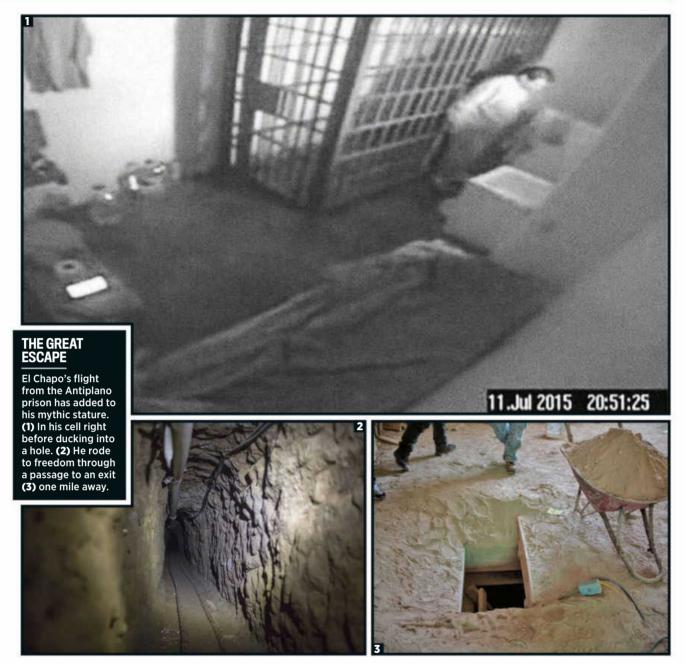
#### "I SUPPLY MORE METHAMPHETAMINE, HEROIN, COCAINE AND MARIJUANA THAN ANYBODY ELSE IN THE WORLD," EL CHAPO PROUDLY VOLUNTEERS.

El Chapo smiles, ironically saying, "Ah! Mi amigo!" His unguarded will to speak freely, his comfort with his station in life and ownership of extraordinary justifications, conjure Tony Montana in Oliver Stone's Scarface. It's the dinner scene where Elvira, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, walks out on Al Pacino's Tony Montana, loudly assailing him in a public place. The patrons at the restaurant stare at him, but rather than hide in humiliation, he stands and lectures them. "You're all a bunch of fucking assholes. You know why? You don't have the guts to be what you wanna be. You need people like me. You need people like me. So you can point your fucking fingers and say, 'That's the bad guy.' So what's that make you? Good? You're not good. You just know how to hide...how to lie. Me? I don't have that problem. Me?! I always tell the truth even when I lie. So say good night to the bad guy. C'mon. Last time you're gonna see a bad guy like this again, lemme tell ya!"

I'm curious, in the current pandemonium of the Middle East, what impact those frenzied opiate economies may have on his business. I ask him, "Of all the countries and cultures with whom you do business, explain that, for authentication purposes, it would be best if we are shaking hands, looking into the camera, but not smiling. He obliges. The picture is taken on Alfredo's cellphone. It would be sent to me at a later date.

When we return to the picnic table, it seems to me that we accomplished what we came to do. We had come to agreement that he would submit to a two-day interview upon my return. As thoughts of surveillance drones and military raids come back into my head, I re-engage the tequila and scan 360 degrees for where I and my colleagues may lay flat and find cover should we have been followed and a raid initiated. In the darkness, it was difficult to imagine a safe place, and El Chapo's world is anything but.

As Espinoza returns from his slumber, Kate, succumbing to the exhausting day's journey and the solace of a few tequilas, accepts the escort of El Chapo to her sleeping quarters. As he walks her alone toward the dimly lit bungalow, I can't help but have a primal moment of concern. I consider offering to accompany them, though the circumstances would certainly prove any protective action futile. Before my ad-



towers above me, knowing he is inadvertently caught with proximity to the fivefoot-three couch, and that I, at five feet nine, am left standing only inches from a king-size bed. It's a Mexican standoff. We'd both travelled hard that day, both slightly medicated by tequila through the night. I only know that if I was going to take the short couch, it would be at gunpoint. I negotiate. "Listen, man. You don't have to sleep on that couch. The bed's big. We can talk and cuddle." With this prospect, I win the negotiation. In his grace and discretion, El Alto makes his choice: "I'll go with the couch." As I collapse onto the bed, I hear El Chapo's convoy drive away into the night jungle.

OT TWO HOURS LATER, WE ARE abruptly awakened by Alonzo. "A storm is coming!" he says. "We have to move!" The dirt tracks of the jungle are difficult to navigate when monsoon rains saturate them. We'd have to beat the rain to the tarmac road. At daybreak, we just make it to pavement as the ocean falls from the sky and great bolts of lightning illuminate the inside of our vehicle like flash-bang grenades. Alonzo asks Kate to drive. She jumps at the chance to break the monotony, and takes the wheel like a trouper. Meanwhile, El Alto hops into the open flatbed, his sleep-starved brain so hungry for oxygen that he's oblivious to the pouring rain. In the backseat, Alonzo whispers to me that there are multiple military checkpoints along these roads, and they tend to wave by vehicles driven by women. In this case, the rain falls hard enough that soldiers have abandoned their posts for cover. Mercifully, we are stopped by no one. Rather than risk being vaporised in a small aircraft by a lightning storm, we opted for the eighthour drive back to the city where we'd started. Espinoza reclines in the passenger seat to rest his back.

By the time we hit the city, the weather has cleared. We shower in the rooms we'd booked. Twenty minutes later, Kate, Espinoza and I, along with Alonzo, get into two taxicabs and head to the airport. El Alto, who'd spent his two hours' sleep the

night before on a firm couch a full foot shorter than he, then waterlogged himself in the flatbed, elects to stay behind in the comfort of the hotel bed for the night and leave the following day. Alonzo heads to Mexico City. Espinoza to Europe. So Kate and I board the charter back to Los Angeles. Our heads are spinning. Had we really just been where we were? With whom we'd been? It seemed such a strange dream. Somehow, with all the planning and the travel, I still hadn't believed that we'd actually gotten to El Chapo. I'd imagined us arriving to a gentle apology, that for some unexplained security reason the visit could not take place, and we'd be going home to Los Angeles empty-handed. But that's not what happened.

When we land back on home turf, Kate and I part ways. I am picked up by a car service. In the backseat, my L.A.-based assistant had left a manila envelope with my cellphone in it. I turn on the phone to the explosion of a two-day backlog of e-mails and text messages. Ignoring them, I hit my browser for updates. What I didn't know, and what was not yet being reported, was that from the time the weather cleared, a military siege on Sinaloa was imminent. Evidently, El Chapo and his men, after leaving us the night before, had skirted through the jungle back to a ranch property. According to media reports that didn't come until days later, a cellphone among his crew had been tracked. From the time the military and the DEA moved in on them, the reports of what happened are conflicted. A source familiar with the cartel in-

formed me on October 3rd that the initial siege had begun. That source and another on the ground in Sinaloa reported that over the next several days, two military helicopters were shot down and Mexican marine ground troops laid siege to several ranch properties. There were additional reports that 13 Sinaloa communities had been ravaged with gunfire during simultaneous raids. La Comision Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (the National Commission for Human Rights) struggled to enter the area but were prohibited. Villagers protested their treatment by the military. By the time news agencies broadcast the story in the United States, the mayhem throughout Sinaloa in those days had been essentially reduced to a nearly successful raid that had surgically targeted only Chapo and his men, and claimed he had been injured in flight with face and

El Chapo's own account would later be shared with me, through a BBM exchange he had with Kate. "On October 6th, there was an operation.... Two helicopters and 6 BlackHawks began a confrontation upon their arrival. The marines dispersed throughout the farms. The families had to escape and abandon their homes with the fear of being killed. We still don't know how many dead in total." When asked about the reports of his own injuries, Chapo responded, "Not like they said. I only hurt my leg a little bit."

Four days later, I fly from Los Angeles to Lima, Peru, to participate in a World Bank panel discussion. After a few days in Lima, and an overnight in Managua, Nicaragua, to visit an old friend, it's October 11th – the day El Chapo and I had agreed to meet. Understandably, he and his crew had gone dark during the raids. Nonetheless, I board an available flight to a nearby Mexican city, and leave a message for Alonzo that I would wait in that Mexican airport for several hours, to make sure they

THE MOVIE STAR

Kate del Castillo, one

brokered the meeting.

of the most famous

actors in Mexico.

know that I had honoured my commitment to return on the eighth day. I land in the late afternoon, then sit around

the airport until the evening hours, hoping a stranger will tap me on the shoulder and tell me he is a friend of Alonzo's and that I should leave with him. It also occurs to me, once again, that I might be under the eyes of Mexican intelligence or the DEA. In either case, no contact is made. So I board a flight later that evening on my own, and return to Los Angeles.

In the weeks that follow, I continue to make attempts to contact El Chapo. In that time, massive sweeps by military and law enforcement lead to hundreds of arrests, seizures and several extraditions of cartel personnel to the United States. Reports that a rising drug gang, the CJNG (Jalisco New Generation Cartel), may have been involved with El Chapo's prison escape and that CJNG may become, in effect, the paramilitary wing of the Sinaloa cartel, have added to governmental concerns. In other words, with the water boil-

ing, our cartel intermediaries had gone principally off radar, or possibly been arrested, or killed.

Finally, Kate is able to re-establish contact through a web of BBM devices. But the heat of enforcement and surveillance had become extreme. I even received a credible tip that the DEA had indeed become aware of our journey to Mexico. Booking any flight to Mexico now would surely raise red flags. I make a plan to hide myself in the trunk of a friend's car and be driven to a waiting rental vehicle. I would then drive the rental from L.A. to Yuma, Arizona, then cross the border at Algodones. I'm familiar with this crossing - papers are not checked, and vehicles are waved through without scrutiny. I'd then drive the 80-some-odd miles from the border to the Grande Desierto, and

the village of El Golfo de Santa Clara, rendezvousing with a cartel plane that could take me to El Chapo. But Kate is insistent that if I am to make that journey, she would have to come with me. The route is relatively safe, but there are some narco-controlled areas, including a few that are not friendly to the Sinaloa cartel. There were also two military checkpoints the last time I had driven that route. The idea of a gringo driving with a Mexican film star would likely draw too much attention, but Kate would have it no other way. It becomes apparent that the risks outweigh the benefits on all sides, and we decide that, instead, I will send

my questions to El Chapo by BBM. He agrees that he will record his responses on videotape. Without being present, I could neither control the questioning nor prod for elaborations to his responses. In addition, every question sent

first had to be translated into Spanish. Remarkably, while Chapo has access to hundreds of soldiers and associates at all times, apparently not one speaks English.

At the end of each day that passed without receipt of the video, Kate would reassure me that it was only one more day away. But each night, El Chapo contacted her with more delays and apparent doubts. Not about my inquiries, but seemingly about how to make a tape of himself. "Kate, let me get this straight. The guy runs a multibillion-dollar business with a network of at least 50 countries, and there's not one fucker down there in the jungle with him who speaks a word of friggin' English? Now tonight, you're telling me his BBM went on the blink, that he's got hardly any access to a goddamn computer?! Are you saying he doesn't have the technical capability to make a self-video and smuggle it into the United States?"

I ask myself, How in the fuck does anyone run a business that way?! I go Full-Trump-Gringo on Kate, battering her daily by phone, text and encrypted email. In the end, the delay had nothing to do with technical incompetence. Big surprise. Whatever villainy is attributable to this man, and his indisputable street genius, he is also a humble, rural Mexican, whose perception of his place in the world offers a window into an extraordinary riddle of cultural disparity. It became evident that the peasant-farmerturned-billionaire-drug-lord seemed to be overwhelmed and somewhat bewildered at the notion that he may be of interest to the world beyond the mountains. And the day-after-day delays might reveal an insecurity in him, like an awkward teenager bashful to go unguided before the camera. Or had all of this been an orchestrated performance?

When those hoops had finally been jumped through, mostly by Kate but at my relentless direction, the only retaliation I was left fearing during my engagement with El Chapo Guzmán and the Sinaloa cartel was the potential wrath of a Mexican actress toward an American actor who had single-mindedly abused his friendship with her to retrieve the needed video. And then an encrypted message came from Kate: "Got it!" I nearly hit the ceiling with excitement as Kate's follow-up dinged on my phone, "... you pushy motherfucker." I'd earned that. Evidently, a courier for El Chapo had delivered her the video. Kate and I met up, I made my apologies, and she transferred the video from her device to mine. At home, I turned down the lights, sat with an English transcription provided by Kate, which began with her note: "The video runs for 17 minutes. Press play."

He sits in a turquoise-and-navy paisley long-sleeve button-down shirt and clean black slacks on a randomly placed stool. The signature moustache that he wore in our last meeting, now gone. His trademark black trucker's hat, absent. His hair combed, or perhaps cap-matted, conjuring the vision of a wide-eyed schoolboy unsure of his teacher's summons. His hands folded across each other, a selfsoothing thumb crossing the knuckle of the other. Beside him, a short white brick wall topped by a chain-link fence. Behind that, a white 4x4 pickup truck. The location appears as a large, ranchlike property with low-lying mountains far in the distance and the intermittent cockadoodledoo of farm roosters serving as the Greek chorus to the interview. Throughout the video, we see farm workers and paramilitaries crossing behind him. A German shepherd sniffs the dirt and wanders out of frame.

#### THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF A DRUG LORD

Born in the Golden Triangle – the remote heart of Mexico's drug production – El Chapo has a history of outrageous escapes, horrific violence and pure profit

#### December 25, 1954, or April 4, 1957

Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán is born (the official date is contested) in La Tuna, Sinaloa. His father was "officially" a cattle rancher, but according to Malcolm Beith's biography, *The Last Narco*, locals say he was actually a *gomero*, or opium farmer.

#### Late 1970s

El Chapo begins running drugs from the Sierra to major Mexican cities and to the border. He develops a reputation for efficiency and ruthlessness.

#### Early 1980s



El Chapo is introduced to the Sinaloa cartel's leader, Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo (a.k.a. El

Padrino), the godfather of the modern Mexican drug trade.

#### 1989

El Padrino's cartel is divided among the capos, making it more self-sufficient and less visible to law enforcement. El Chapo and "El Mayo" Zambada take over the operations along the Pacific Coast.

#### Early 1990s

El Chapo methodically builds his cartel while providing services for the poor, earning fierce loyalty in his home turf. "You are financing everything: Baptisms. Infrastructure," a former Mexican ambassador said. "You are Santa Claus. And everybody likes Santa Claus."



#### **Early 1992**

El Chapo begins to expand into Tijuana, encroaching on the Arellano Felix brothers of the Tijuana cartel and setting off a deadly gang war.

#### June 1993

El Chapo flees across Mexico to Guatemala, where he's arrested and sentenced to 20 years for murder and trafficking.

#### January 19, 2001

El Chapo escapes from a maximum-security prison in a laundry cart. The escape costs him as much as \$2.5 million, and results in the detention of 73 prison officials.

#### Early 2000s

El Chapo muscles into
Tijuana and Gulf cartel
territory, and open warfare
breaks out. "Sinaloa was very
much the instigator of much
of the violence in Mexico in
the early parts of the 2000s,"
Vanda Felbab-Brown, of the
Brookings Institution, said.
But "they never adopted the
same level of violence and
carnage [as their rivals]".

#### 2004

The escalating violence draws renewed attention from U.S. and Mexican authorities, leading to at least two almost-captures of El Chapo. The Mexican army receives a tip that he is throwing a party. Helicopters rain down on a ranch

that they suspect is owned by Chapo. "Every time he gets away, they tell us, 'He got out the back door'," said one

American official. "U.S. officials have started to joke that there is no word for 'surround' in Spanish."

#### July 2, 2007

El Chapo throws a wedding party for himself and his fourth wife, beauty queen Emma Coronel Aispuro, on her 18th birthday. The military tries to raid the festivities, only to find the couple had left on their honeymoon.



#### May 8, 2008

El Chapo's son Edgar is killed in a parking-lot shootout. The murder inspires a rash of revenge killings, and beheadings become a common sight throughout Sinaloa.

#### 2009

Cartel members begin to use unlicensed drug-rehab centres as safe houses in Ciudad Juarez. In September, men stormed a rehab clinic in the city and murdered 17 patients – one of several similar attacks rumoured to be the work of the Sinaloa cartel.

#### February 22, 2014

After 13 years on the run, Chapo is arrested in Mazatlan. "I killed two or three thousand," Chapo told law enforcement. "I'm a drug trafficker. I don't kidnap or steal or extort or anything like that."



#### July 11, 2015

El Chapo escapes from a maximum-security prison through a tunnel under a shower, and was the target of a nationwide manhunt.

#### January 8, 2016

Chapo is captured in Los Mochis, Sinaloa.

#### **ELCHAPO SPEAKS**

He begins: "I want to make clear that this interview is for the exclusive use of Miss Kate del Castillo and Mister Sean Penn." The image goes black.

When it returns, so has he to the comfort of his trucker hat.

Of the many questions I'd sent El Chapo, a cameraman out of frame asks a few of them directly, paraphrases others, softens many and skips some altogether.

How was your childhood?

I remember from the time I was six until now, my parents, a very humble family, very poor, I remember how my mum made bread to support the family. I would sell it, I sold oranges, I sold soft drinks, I sold candy. My mum, she was a hard worker, she worked a lot. We grew corn, beans. I took care of my grandmother's cattle and chopped wood.

And how did you get involved in the drug business?

Well, from the time I was 15 and after, where I come from, which is the munic-

Is it true what they say that drugs destroy humanity and bring harm?

Well, it's a reality that drugs destroy. Unfortunately, as I said, where I grew up there was no other way and there still isn't a way to survive, no way to work in our economy to be able to make a living.

Do you think it is true you are responsible for the high level of drug addiction in the world?

No, that is false, because the day I don't exist, it's not going to decrease in any way at all. Drug trafficking? That's false.

Did your drug business grow and expand when you were in jail?

From what I can tell, and what I know, everything is the same. Nothing has decreased. Nothing has increased.

What about the violence attached to this type of activity?

In part, it is because already some people already grow up with problems, and there is some envy and they have informamore of us, and lots of different ways of thinking.

What is the outlook for the business? Do you think it will disappear? Will it grow instead?

No, it will not end because as time goes by, we are more people, and this will never end.

Do you think terrorism activities in the Middle East will, in any way, impact the future of drug trafficking?

No, sir. It doesn't make a difference at all.

You saw how the final days of Escobar were. How do you see your final days with respect to this business?

I know one day I will die. I hope it's of natural causes.

The U.S. government thinks that the Mexican government does not want to arrest you. What they want to do is to kill you. What do you think?

No, I think that if they find me, they'll arrest me, of course.

With respect to your activities, what do you think the impact on Mexico is? Do you think there is a substantial impact?

Not at all. Not at all.

Why?

Because drug trafficking does not depend on just one person. It depends on a lot of people.

What is your opinion about who is to blame here, those who sell drugs, or the people who use drugs and create a demand for them? What is the relationship between production, sale and consumption?

If there was no consumption, there would be no sales. It is true that consumption, day after day, becomes bigger and bigger. So it sells and sells.

We hear avocado is good for you, lime is good for you, guanabana is good for you. But we never hear anyone doing any publicity with respect to drugs. Have you done anything to induce the public to consume more drugs?

Not at all. That attracts attention. People, in a way, want to know how it feels or how it tastes. And then the addiction gets bigger.

Do you have any dreams? Do you dream?

Whatever is normal. But dreaming daily? No.

But you must have some dreams, some hopes for your life?

I want to live with my family the days God gives me.

If you could change the world, would you?

For me, the way things are, I'm happy.

How is your relationship with your

My relationship? Perfect. Very well. Is it one of respect? Yes, sir, respect, affection and love.

#### "IF THEY FIND ME, THEY'LL ARREST ME. BUT DRUG TRAFFICKING DOES NOT DEPEND ON JUST ONE PERSON. IT DEPENDS ON A LOT OF PEOPLE."

ipality of Badiraguato, I was raised in a ranch named La Tuna, in that area, and up until today, there are no job opportunities. The only way to have money to buy food, to survive, is to grow poppy, marijuana, and at that age, I began to grow it, to cultivate it and to sell it. That is what I can tell you.

How did you leave there? How did it all expand?

From there, from my ranch, I started to leave at 18 and went to Culiacan, then after to Guadalajara, but never without visiting my ranch, even up until today, because my mum, thanks to God, is still alive, out there in our ranch, which is La Tuna, and so, that is how things have been.

How has your family life changed from then to now?

Very good – my children, my brothers, my nephews. We all get along well, very normal. Very good.

And now that you are free, how has it affected you?

Well, as for being free – happy, because freedom is really nice, and pressure, well, for me it's normal, because I've had to be careful for a few years now in certain cities, and, no, I don't feel anything that hurts my health or my mind. I feel good.

tion against someone else. That is what creates violence.

Do you consider yourself a violent per-

No, sir.

Are you prone to violence, or do you use it as a last resort?

Look, all I do is defend myself, nothing more. But do I start trouble? Never.

What is your opinion about the situation in Mexico, what is the outlook for Mexico?

Well, drug trafficking is already part of a culture that originated from the ancestors. And not only in Mexico. This is worldwide.

Do you consider your activity, your organisation, a cartel?

No, sir, not at all. Because people who dedicate their lives to this activity do not depend on me.

How has this business evolved from the time you started up until today?

Big difference. Today there are lots of drugs, and back then, the only ones we knew were marijuana and poppy.

What is the difference in people now compared to back then?

Big difference, because now, day after day, villages are getting bigger, and there's



How do you see the future for your sons and daughters? Very well. They get along right. The family is tight.

How about your life? How has your life changed, how

have you lived it since you escaped?

Lots of happiness - because of my freedom.

The author and

and conversation

Did you ever use drugs?

No, sir. Many years ago, yes, I did try them. But an addict? No.

How long ago?

I haven't done any drugs in the last 20 years.

Did it not worry you that you might be putting your family at risk with your escape?

For your recent escape, did you pursue your freedom at any cost, at the expense of anybody?

I never thought of hurting anyone. All I did was ask God, and things worked out. Everything was perfect. I am here, thank God.

The two times you escaped, it is worth mentioning, there was no violence.

With me, it did not come to that. In other situations, what's been seen, things occur differently, but here, we did not use any violence.

Bearing in mind what has been written about you, what one can see on TV, things

are said about you in then-fugitive El Chapo Mexico, what kind of Guzmán, on October message would you like 2nd, after a long dinner to convey to the people of Mexico?

> Well, I can say it's normal that people have mixed feelings because some people know me and others don't. That is the reason I say it is normal. Because those who do not know me can have their doubts about saying if, in this case, I'm a good person or not.

> If I ask you to define yourself as a person, if I ask you to pretend you are not Joaquín, instead you are the person who knows him better than anybody else in the world, how would you define yourself?

> Well, if I knew him - with respect, and from my point of view, it's a person who's not looking for problems in any way. In any way.

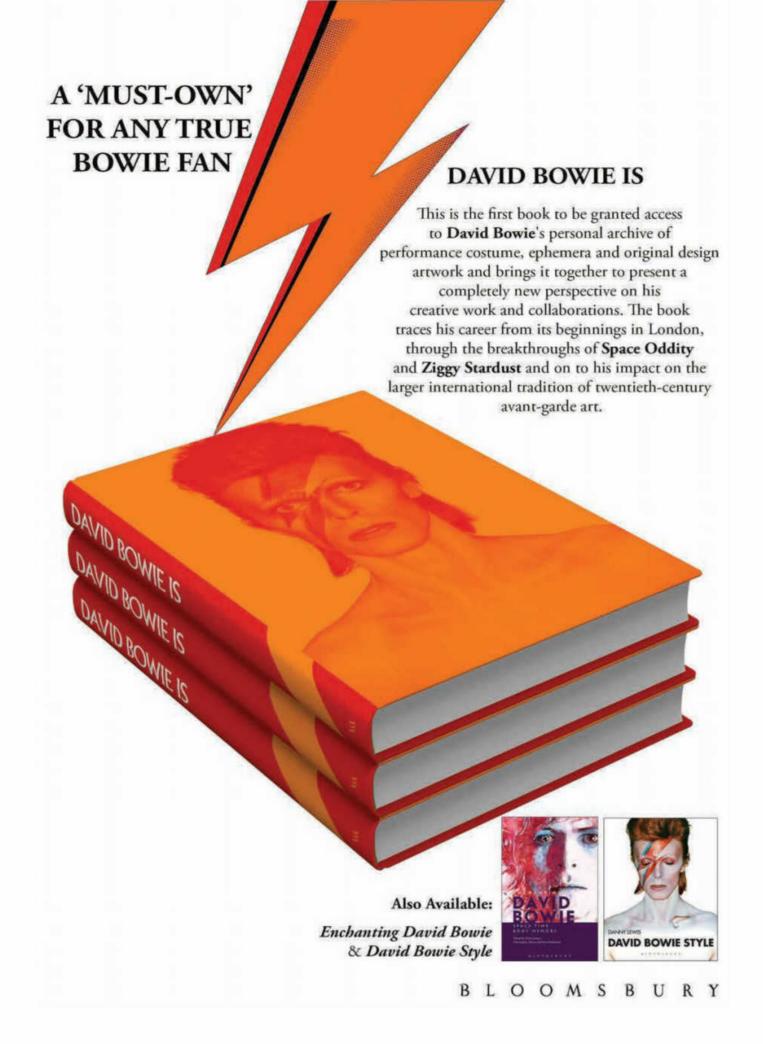
> INCE OUR LATE-NIGHT VISIT IN the Mexican mountains, raids on ranches there have been relentless. A war zone. Navy helicopters waging air assaults and inserting troops. Helos shot down by Sinaloa cartel gunmen, Marines killed, Cartel fighters killed. Campasinos killed or displaced. Rumours spread that El Chapo escaped to Guatemala, or even further, into South America. But no. He was right there where he was born and raised. On Friday, Janu-

ary 8th, 2016, it happened. El Chapo was captured and arrested - alive.

I think of that night, of that calm before the storm, and the otherworldly experience of sitting with a man so seemingly serene, despite his living a reality so surreal. I had not gotten the kind of in-depth interview I'd hoped to achieve. Not challenged checkers with chess, nor vice versa. But perhaps, at least, retrieved a glimpse from the other side, and what is for me an affirmation of the dumbshow of demonisation that has demanded such an extraordinary focus of assets toward the capture or killing of any one individual black hat.

Still, today, there are little boys in Sinaloa who draw play-money pesos, whose fathers and grandfathers before them harvested the only product they'd ever known to morph those play pesos into real dollars. They wonder at our outrage as we, our children, friends, neighbours, bosses, banks, brothers and sisters finance the whole damn thing. Without a paradigm shift, understanding the economics and illness of addiction, parents in Mexico and the U.S. will increasingly risk replacing that standard parting question to their teens off for a social evening - from "Where are you going tonight?" to "Where are you dying tonight?"

El Chapo? It won't be long, I'm sure, before the Sinaloa cartel's next shipment into the United States is the man himself.





NEW ALBUMS	Pg. 95
MOVIES	Pg. 102
DVDS	Pg. 104
THE LAST PAGE	Pa. 106



### The Wild Heart Inside the Pop Machine

On her seventh LP, Sia reclaims songs that Adele, Rihanna and others turned down



#### Sia

 $This \ Is \ Acting \ {\tt Monkey \, Puzzle/RCA}$ 

#### BY JON DOLAN

The past decade-plus of pop music has been dominated by behind-the-scenes songwriting maestros like Max Martin and Ryan Tedder, but only one of them - 40-year-old Australian Sia Furler – has become a solo star in her own right. Sia had a career as an electronica-leaning artist in the early 2000s, before finding her voice as a Top 40 master blaster, writing smashes for Beyoncé, Rihanna and more. She saved her most intense fire for her own breakout solo hit, 2014's "Chandelier" - a diabolically catchy depiction of alcoholism that was also so real it could scare Jim Beam off booze.

Sia's songs update the grandiose Eighties lite-rock ballad tradition of Diane Warren and Phil Collins for our moodier era of R&B-inscribed feminism, delivering lyrics about strain, perseverance and redemption over tracks that build

from tensely foreboding verse to a titanic cathartic chorus. She's mastered the formula so well that she's made her seventh solo album a commentary on how hit songs are made. The tunes here were originally intended for - and then rejected by - major singers. It's a fascinating study in what it's like to live life imagining yourself in someone else's artistic shoes.

This Is Acting opens with two songs that Sia hoped to land on Adele's 25. Her approximation of the phrasing and tone of the world's most beloved singer over the roiling piano on "Bird Set Free" is uncanny, while "Alive" is a throwback soul crusher that would've been the hardest-hitting thing on that blockbuster LP. Even when the match between artist and material isn't quite copacetic, the quality control is high: Rihanna might've been right to dismiss "Cheap Thrills", but the lithe party tune could've done well for a sprightlier singer like Ariana Grande. Other highlights, such as the industri-

If this is acting, it's the kind of performance that hits as hard as life itself.

al-strength anthem "Unstoppable", feel like they could've been recorded by a half-dozen artists, from Katy Perry to Miley Cyrus.

Sometimes these outtakes feel like, well, outtakes: "Footprints" is an orphan from a Beyoncé writing session with refrigerator-magnet-level lyrics (comparing a relationship's progress to "two footprints in the sand") that Bey was wise to pass on. Impressively, though, for an album that's more about utilitarian versatility than making the songs her own, Sia's personality often comes through. The high point is "One Million Bullets", the only song she wrote with herself in mind. Against a dusky minor-key piano, Sia offers herself as her lover's protector, muse and martyr - her voice cracking perfectly in the chorus as she asks if they'd take a shot for her too. If this is acting, it's the kind of performance that hits as hard as life itself.

**KEY TRACKS:** "One Million Bullets", "Alive"



## The Jezabels' **New Vision**

Sydney quartet rediscover their muse and return to form on third record

The Jezabels Synthia MGM ★★★½



The Jezabels have always dreamed boldly, and beautifully. Their early EPs were colossal New Wave rock screams into a canyon abyss; the production by Lachlan Mitchell on She's So Hard (2009) and Dark Storm (2010) not

**KEY TRACKS:** 

"My Love Is a Dis-

ease", "Pleasure Drive"

so much widescreen as a 360 degree high definition vision. Prisoner, their AMP winning debut album, was another definitive step into their world, but they faltered badly with

2014 follow-up *The Brink*, an underdone record relying on repeated ideas.

Those who became disenchanted with The Brink will be pleased with Synthia, which is a strong return to form. It's a

dark, even menacing, record at times - when Hayley Mary murmurs "whisper in my ear and tell me all the things you want to do" on the crackling "Smile", it's more a chilling command than a kind request. Even more so on the explosive "Come Alive", as she beckons the listener to heed her warning, vocals iced to the nines in reverb and swimming among the chunky, muted guitar chords. Sam Lockwood's guitars inch inexorably closer to U2, but it's his rhythmic playing - delicately weaving staccato chords in and out of deep layers of synths and drums ("Pleasure Drive") - that is beyond impressive. There are some weak links - "Unnatural" floats by leaving no impression - but they are small missteps in an otherwise consistent record. JULES LEFEVRE



#### **Lucinda Williams**

The Ghosts of Highway 20 Highway 20/ Thirty Tigers ★★★★ Americana veteran turns steely eye to the rearview mirror

Opening with the existential numbness of her late father's poem, "Dust", and peaking with the nine-minute childhood reverie of "Louisiana Story", Lucinda Williams' delicately crushed 12th album has been every one of her 62 years in the making. Her ghosts parade in images as sinister as "House of Earth" (words by Woody Guthrie), as biblically stark as "Death Came" and as terse as "Bitter Memory", en route to a long, half-whispered denouement in Mississippi Fred Mc-Dowell's "Faith & Grace". As she addresses her father's fatal disease in "If My Love Could Kill", Williams' parched timbre and tortured vowels contain a rage as profound as her loss.

MICHAEL DWYER



#### Wolfmother

Victorious Universal

Behold the spiritual successor to 'Cosmic Egg'

After 2009's Cosmic Egg, Wolfmother's cultural relevance could be described optimistically as 'negligible'. After a solo album and the rubbish New Crown (2014), Andrew Stockdale has enlisted Brendan O'Brien and delivered an album that once more lifts liberally from rock history. Possessing a fun lightness (and brevity) that Wolfmother have sorely lacked. Victorious is an eminently listenable record: "Simple Life", "Baroness" and "City Lights" are high-order stompers, while "Pretty Peggy" and "Best of a Bad Situation" are a pair of bucolic Zeppelin III changes of pace. Still, the problem remains that for someone so obviously talented, Stockdale gets weirdly little original artistic diversity from it. Jaymz Clements

## The 1975's Pop Heart

#### Manchester rockers miss the mark on second record

The 1975 I Like It When You Sleep, For You Are So Beautiful Yet So Unaware Of It sony ★★/2



From the start, the 1975 were always slightly incongruous, as if Jimmy Eat World had gotten lost in 1980s Manchester and just decided to set up camp. Their 2013

debut tapped a deep vein of teenage angst and delivered it within highly marketable pop rock singles, but they seemed to be shooting with the safety on – any real feelings of danger were noticeably absent.

And again, from the lavish title to its overblown 17 tracks, I Like It ... is more concerned with appearances than real feelings. Matthew

Healy's clipped yelps of lyrical non-sequiturs land no punches as the band sway through serviceable, funk-laced pop.

**KEY TRACKS:** "Love Me",

That said, the addition of funk rhythms has definitely served them well: single "UGH!" is propelled by jaunty polyrhythms and "Love Me" is built on a deliciously sleazy guitar riff. They take a humourous turn in "She's American",



Healy proclaiming "If she says I've got to fix my teeth then she's so American", but *I Like It* . . . quickly loses its drive, with too many repeated ideas and the instrumental interludes knee capping any gained momentum. A brief respite appears in "The Ballad of Me and My Brain", Healy finally opening his vocals to deliver some truly great throat tearing yells. But by the time it comes around there's a great chance you've already lost interest.



#### **Lake Street Dive**

Side Pony Nonesuch/Warner

Nostalgic genre chameleons dine out on Sixties excess

Where Bad Self Portraits (2014) saw LSD give their brogues a solid spit-polish, Side Pony finds the band shining their two-tone Oxford lace-ups to a mirror-like finish. Another headlong plunge into the Sixties and early Seventies, Side Pony is a glorious, sensuous sampler of the age, spanning pop-soul ("Godawful Things"), heaving mod rock ("Hell Yeah"), funkinflected floor-fillers ("Call Off Your Dogs"), and more - with nary a hit-making mid-century label overlooked. Singer Rachael Price is dynamic as ever, her performance underwritten by the flawless musicianship of bassist Bridget Kearney, multi-instrumentalist Michael Olson, and percussionist Mike Calabrese. GARETH HIPWELL



#### DIIV

Is The Is Are Remote Control  $\star\star\star\star$ 

Unlikely triumph for troubled New York outfit

Since 2012's Oshin, DIIV's Zachary Cole Smith has battled drug addictions, criminal charges and a rabid media that's anointed him and girlfriend Sky Ferreira the new Sid and Nancy (they're not). Smith's notoriety was always going to put the second DIIV LP in the spotlight, but he's responded in the best way possible: with a sprawling guitar rock opus that has no right to be this good. While you only get snatches of lyrics, the tumult of Smith's personal life is expressed in every pedal workout and whammy bar dive. Ferreira's ice cool cameo on "Blue Boredom" completes the story. Like Bieber last year, Smith has somehow found redemption through music. Let's hope he doesn't fuck it up. DARREN LEVIN



#### St Lucia

Matter Sony ★★1/2

Upbeat producer's relentless day-glo becomes wearing

Like a stick of fairy floss chased down with a slurpee, Matter, the second album from Brooklyn-via-Johannesburg synth-pop artist St. Lucia (born Jean-Philip Grobler), is a sickly-sweet rush of candied chords and unabashed earnestness, all reach-forthe-rainbows optimism with lashings of cheese. Grobler is a talented producer, and the slowed-down "Love Somebody" is a highlight, stripped back to finger-clicks laced with oriental synths and flute, But unlike, say, Passion Pit or Classix, Grobler's tunes aren't laced with the necessary melancholy or tonal complexity to make them either distinctive or particularly memorable, and the overall effect is something that is, like fairy floss, sweet but inconsequential. Annabel ross



#### Wild Nothing

Life of Pause Remote Control

★★★

U.S. songwriter's jangle-pop a slick way to pass the time

Wild Nothing's Jack Tatum pulls together a crack team of collaborators to make his dream-pop records, and for his third LP he's recruited producer Thom Monahan (Devendra Banhart) and drummer John Eriksson (Peter, Bjorn and John), amongst others. The mission? Follow Tatum's muse - here revealed as an abiding love of soft rock and Eighties indie; rubbery bass, watery guitar, and scant lyrical heft. "Lady Blue" could be a Spandau Ballet B-Side; "Alien" ("you make me feel like an alien/you're so pretty/where did you come from") an Eighties-era Pink Floyd outtake. The catchy funk-lite of "Whenever I" is a more natural fit for Tatum - indie-pop so well put together no one's asking it to say anything. MARCUS TEAGUE



#### Nevermen

Nevermen ada  $\star\star\star^{1/2}$ 

Mike Patton and friends ride high on deranged adventurism

Nevermen are billed as a "leaderless" trio, but "genreless" is just as accurate. Career iconoclast Mike Patton teams up with experimental rapper Doseone and TV on the Radio's Tunde Adebimpe for a dizzying mind meld. The three swap vocals in roundrobin processions that echo and overlap each other's ideas, making some tracks sound like multiple songs playing at once. There are doo wop harmonies, pop choruses, hip-hop beats and art-rock arrangements, all swirling in harried motion. It's a difficult album to warm to, but the catchy verve of "Mr Mistake" offsets the more ephemeral entries. Listen long enough these dense swarms of activity begin to make a stubborn kind of sense, poug wallen



Hank Williams Jr.

It's About Time
Nash Icon ★★

Country vet rocks out, waves guns around, incites snoozes

At 66, country music's cranky uncle has been running a successful cottage industry in right-leaning outlaw posturing for decades. His latest full-length showcases an admirably hot band, with guests including Eric Church - see the fiddle-spiked take on Neil Young's "Are You Ready for the Country?" But the party gets weird around "God and Guns", a hard-rock NRA hand job that's meatheaded and inflammatory. Elsewhere, attempts at pop coalition-building become wishful thinking. "If you're singin' along with this song, then I guess you agree," Williams suggests on the nostalgic "Those Days Are Gone". Not necessarily, dude.

WILL HERMES



#### **Basement**

Promise Everything
Run For Cover \*\* \*\* \*\* \*/2

Brits pay homage to alt.-rock's heyday on comeback LP

Basement pull off a neat trick on their third LP (and first since returning from a threeyear hiatus): although Promise Everything sounds like a Nineties album, it's nearly impossible to compare it with other classic LPs from that time. You might hear strains of Sunny Day Real Estate, Nirvana, Far or Hum, but it's to the band's credit that no song sounds derivative. The interplay between the five members alternates between energetic and serene - there are tidal-wave choruses and moments of intimacy, but not an ounce of self-indulgence. It will invoke intense nostalgia in those who participated in alternative music in the 1990s, but should be heard by anyone who values sincere, thrilling guitar music. DAN F. STAPLETON



## Henry Wagons' Nashville Debut

Melbourne cowboy acts out redemption in Tennessee

Henry Wagons After What I Did Last Night...

ABC ★★★



Making a rekkid in Nashville with real live Americans seems to be on every Aussie troubadour's bucket list these days. Henry Wagons' turn naturally fuels his musical passions and his booming and crooning cartoon coun-

**KEY TRACKS:** 

try persona in equal measure.

His first solo journey is a prodigal cowboy's progress from the hungover scoundrel in the curiously disjointed "Cold Burger, Cold Fries" to the clip-clop homecoming of "Mel-

bourne". The jangling riff and crushed dignity of "Weak Link" comprise the best-realised scene of the scattershot screenplay.

ised scene of the scattershot "Weak Link", "King Hit", "Only Child" ter-building trials by alcohol

Character-building trials by alcohol include the honky tonk dilemma of "Head Or Heart", the raucous Eastern European stopover "Cowboy In Krakow", and the grunting chain gang slap of "King Hit": not a comment on a current social scourge, more a funny fight scene in one of those saloons where the chairs are made of balsawood.

There's a touch of zydeco madness in "Only Sane Mother F\*\*\*\*\*" and a welcome dose of ambiguity in the ethereal dream sequence, "Santa Fe", but only a couple of what might be genuine revelations. The paternal tenderness of "As Long As I Breathe" and the deep back story of "Only Child" are two from the heart. The rest is more wryly crafted than true confessional, but the rolling Wagons saga is no less fun for that.



#### **Mavis Staples**

Livin'On a High Note anti

\*\*\*\*

Gospel godmother gives a little help to her friends

"The world is big. And sometimes wrong. But truth is bigger. And twice as strong." The message from the deep smelter of Mavis Staples' lungs doesn't change much, whether it's penned by Neko Case, Ben Harper, Justin Vernon or, in this case ("Don't Cry"), producer M Ward. But the queue of songwriters eager for her sweet absolution results in another richly varied leap of faith here, as joyous as Valerie June's title track and as quietly committed as Nick Cave's "Jesus Lay Down Beside Me". Whether he's channelling the great lady's own life story in "Take Us Back" or Martin Luther King's selfless conviction in the acoustic finale, Ward's deft touch is the anchor that allows her to soar.



#### **Various Artists**

Good For You milk!  $\star\star\star$ \\'2

Our Courtney leads a solid Melbourne mini-sampler

Courtney Barnett may have catapulted to the big leagues, but the Melbourne micro-label she co-runs focuses on intimate tunes from a small stable of acts. Milk! showcases its latest wares with this EP, kicking off with Barnett's typically witty ode to two-minute noodles. Fraser A. Gorman then sings of washing windows, East Brunswick All Girls Choir turn in a woozily romantic dirge, and the Finks stay sweetly twangy. The highlight is Jen Cloher's acerbic "Famously Monogamous", evoking the best of the Matador Records school of Nineties indie rock. The wild card, though, is Ouch My Face, who hijack rap bluster and pitch-shifted vocals for "Nice Haircut," a gleeful departure from singer/ songwriter subtlety.

## Alien Pop Fiends

Shape-shifting pop experimentalists return with their most fun album yet

#### **Animal Collective**

Painting With Domino ★★★★



Ever had trouble wrapping your head around Animal Collective? Try thinking of them as a bunch of aliens trying to interpret the music of earth. It's how Noah Lennox

imagines the band he formed with David Portner, Brian Weitz and Josh Dibb in 1999 – and it makes sense when you hear the way they boil down layers of sonic detritus into something we humans understand as pop.

So when they say they're making an album that's "punchy", "minimal"

that's "punchy", "minimal" and inspired by the Ramones, you really have to imagine how an alien house band would interpret such things.

**KEY TRACKS:**"FloriDada", "Natural Selection",
"Hocus Pocus"

Perhaps they'd project dinosaur flicks onto the studio wall and set up a kiddie pool for inspiration. Perhaps they'd bury two distinct musical voices – the iconic John Cale and avant saxo-



phonist Colin Stetson – in the sonic milieu like a 'Where's Wally?' puzzle. The truth is they did all those things.

"FloriDada" sets the tone early, giddily juxtaposing a maligned U.S. state with an art movement rooted in absurdity. As always, the twin voices of Lennox and Portner criss-cross each other like an abstract painting of the Beach Boys; their melodies flickering brighter than the often abrasive *Centipede Hz* (2012). From snatches of the *Golden Girls* to the vocal game of tiggy played on "Summing the Wretch", these aliens are having a killer time on earth.



Don't You sony
★★

Major label debut for downtempo trio a shallow affair

If you're not making future RnB in 2016 do you exist? Brooklyn trio Wet are your latest option in carefully rendered, earnest beat-making, singer/songwriter Kelly Zutrau obsessed with glacial teen-pop odes to inner difficulties. But it falls closer to Taylor Swift balladry than the singular atmospherics of, say, the Weeknd, and that's an issue -Wet's sound is already old hat. "Deadwater" is a slinky update of yacht rock and the minimalist beauty of "You're the Best" could start bands. They're the exceptions - personality-free tracks like "Weak" and "Body" are more cloying examples of Zutrau's infuriatingly passive take on relationships. Stick to sad Swift. MARCUS TEAGUE



#### **Monster Truck**

Sittin'Heavy Dine Alone

Sophomore LP from Canadians with riffs as big as the Rockies

You could never accuse this Canadian quartet of taking life too seriously – certainly song titles such as "Why Are You Not Rocking", and the fact this album contains a tribute to ice hockey ("The Enforcer"), suggest they're a band that has a good time all the time. What's undeniable, though, is their way around a riff, the Juno Award-winners channelling everyone from Black Sabbath to Spiritual Beggars, with lashings of Hammond B3 and Jon Harvey's bluesy, whiskey-soaked vocal roar smothered over the top. Such stoner-indebted riff-rock is a well-farmed field, but there's an electricity even in the album's moodier moments ("Black Forest") that elevates Sittin'Heavy above similar acts. SIMON JONES



#### **Your Friend**

 $Gumption \ {\tt Domino}$ 

\*\*\*

Another epic statement from Montreal's finest

Twenty-four-year-old Kansas native Taryn Miller's singing voice is one that aches hard: a double shot of romantic yearning followed with a swift chaser of deep melancholy. Her 2014 EP Jekyll/Hyde showcased a brand of alt-country/indie folk not too dissimilar from the likes of Sharon Van Etten, but with assistance from producer Nicolas Vernhes (Deerhunter) Gumption carves out a new path that separates her from the pack. "Heathering" is a signifier of the new M.O.: layered loops and beefier production from Vernhes, who gives Miller's songs a less-sand-kickedin-the-face Beach House vibe. Gumption basks in an alluring, dreamy haze, yet still manages to feel the opposite of featherweight. JAMES JENNINGS



#### The Cult

 $Hidden\ City\ {\it Cooking\ Vinyl}$ 

\*\*\*

Perennial rockers deliver third instalment of trilogy

Though their music has, at points, been aimed solely at your crotch (1987's Electric), the Cult have long harboured loftier lyrical goals. Their 10th album (and closing chapter in a trilogy that started with 2007's Born Into This) is concerned with what vocalist Ian Astbury calls "spiritual lives" and "intimate interior lives". Reunited with uber-producer Bob Rock (Metallica), Hidden City contains the requisite amount of Billy Duffy guitar slinging and Astbury's howling vocals, but suffers from arrangements so dense it can be difficult finding the heart of each song. At its best when they lay off the gas (the title-track), Hidden City is a good LP that feels like it has a great one lurking within, if only you could get to it.



#### **Junior Boys**

Big Black Coat Inertia

\*\*\*

Electronic duo go dark but lose colour on comeback record

After a five-year hiatus, Canadian duo Jeremy Greenspan and Matt Didemus are back with a darker, techier offering, but their other hallmarks - impeccable, impossibly intricate production, Greenspan's heartsqueezing falsetto, and moody, thinky dance music - remain. Caribou is, more than ever, an obvious reference point, but too many of these tracks feel like noodlings made from the bed and for the bed, meandering languidly without ever really taking off. The title-track and "Over It" are exceptions, the latter's running beat and Greenspan's treated vocals coalescing with measured urgency. The rest is typically glossy but suffers, unlike their previous records, from a monotonous inertia. ANNABEL ROSS



#### **Buddy Miller & Friends**

Cayamo Sessions At SeaNew West/Warner  $\star\star\star \star 1/2$ 

Singer-songwriter goes to sea, makes album

Americana pater familias Buddy Miller has nothing to prove. Hence Cayamo: 11 duets tracked aboard a Caribbean cruise-liner during annual floating roots festival Cayamo in 2014/15. While Lee Ann Womack and Lucinda Williams shine, country's artists-of-themoment steal the show: Kacey Musgraves on Buck Owens' "Love's Gonna Live Here", Nikki Lane on Sixties-hued Dolly/ Porter weeper "Just Someone I Used To Know", and Elizabeth Cook - an uncanny stand-in for Dolly - on "If Teardrops Were Pennies". While some entries ultimately fail to launch (Brandi Carlile/The Lone Bellow's "Angel from Montgomery"), Miller plays the consummate foil throughout. GARETH HIPWELL



#### **Milwaukee Banks**

Deep Into the Night Dot Dash  $\star\star\star$ /2

Low-slung, spaced-out hip-hop seeded with dark emotions

Eschewing the bravado that feeds so much hip-hop, Melbourne duo Milwaukee Banks instead mine brooding desperation on their debut LP. The minimal, disembodied production evokes Shabazz Palaces, but the rhymes are much more heart-on-sleeve than abstract. These sleepy mantras are all about melancholy and catharsis; opener "Too High to Die" sets the album's defeated tone like a prolonged sigh. Rather than being a downer, such unwavering attention to personal doubts matches the slowmoving disorientation achieved through the flickering beats of "Shame on Me". There are some weaker moments ("Gold Rush"), but Deep into the Night is uncommonly honest and darkly therapeutic. Doug Wallen



## Dancing To a Familiar Beat

Solid if unadventurous second album contains flashes of brilliance

RÜFÜS Bloom Sweat It Out ★★★½



The Sydney trio that are RÜFÜS – vocalist and guitarist Tyrone Lindqvist, keyboardist Jon George and drummer James Hunt – have some perennial concerns. As with their first album, Atlas, their second outing is largely

about dreams, the sun, night turning into morning – standard ecstasy-fuelled themes. "Can you feel the sunshine, make it brighter, make it brighter for me, when that sun comes shining on me," Lindqvist sings on "Brighter", es-

sentially an update of *Atlas*' "Sundream". And in spite of their efforts to shake up their sound – "Brighter" with house keys and soulful female vocals, "Like an Animal" with pina colada-ready riffs,

**KEY TRACKS:** "Innerbloom", "When the Sun Needs To Rise"

"Say a Prayer for Me" with a ticking metronomic beat – a lot of these tracks are none too distinguishable from the songs from *Atlas*. That's not to say they're bad – RÜFÜS are clearly astute students of the likes of Booka Shade, and Lindqvist's plaintive croon recalls Bob Moses' Tom Howie and is just as affecting. Dena Amy, George's girlfriend, offsets Lindqvist's dolefulness on "Hypnotised", and while "Until the Sun Needs to Rise" (there it is again) might be more *Atlas* regurgitated, there's a breakdown at the three-minute mark that's going to sound huge live. Best of all is "Innerbloom", the nearly-10-minute-long, largely instrumental, built for daybreak at Burning Man closer. When RÜFÜS manage to transcend their limitations, they're sublime.



#### Wynonna & the Big Noise

Wynonna & the Big Noise Curb/Sony ★★★

Faded country superstar mounts a serviceable comeback

Country's chart-toppers of the Eighties and Nineties are best forgotten. At the top of the pile was Wynonna Judd, both in solo mode and as one half of megaduo the Judds. Her first original LP since 2003, Wynonna & the Big Noise smacks of reinvention, finding the formidable singer and established live band the Big Noise delving into ragged blues-guitar and seamy Southern sounds: see "Cool Ya", with its swampy delta groove. Confessional "Things That I Lean On" (featuring Jason Isbell) is a frank centrepiece, while "Jesus and a Jukebox" is a consummate country weeper. But there's a touch too much vestigial schmaltz - witness "Every Ending".



#### Lissie Mariaza ia

My Wild West Cooking Vinyl

More Laurel Canyon-style folk-rock from singer-songwriter

A strong theme of departures and new beginnings is threaded through Lissie's third album, reflecting her recent move from California back to her native Midwest. There is, therefore, a wistfulness, perhaps a mournfulness, that makes the gentler country-flavoured songs like "Together or Apart" and "Ojai" extremely affecting. Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt are evoked on these stronger numbers; less successful are some dull attempts at U2-esque rock, including the title track and "Don't You Give Up On Me". The nasal twang to her gripping vocals is, however, among several redeeming features on an LP that is an admirable, if not spectacular, addition to the catalogue of an impressively consistent artist. BARNABY SMITH

## Bloc Party's Mixed Messages

Reconstructed band's fifth LP is the sound of its frontman at a crossroads

#### **Bloc Party**

Hymns Create Control/BMG \*\*\*/2



When original members, drummer Matt Tong and bassist Gordon Moakes, left Bloc Party in 2013 and 2015 respectively, few would have besmirched the UK indie-

flagbearers for calling time. Across four albums their tumultuous legacy as one of the most exciting groups of the '00s was assured. But now Hymns – the band's fifth record, and first with new bassist Justin Harris of Menomena (but not new drummer Louise Bartle, who joined the band after its completion), is an uneven and ultimately dull stab at resurrection.

Inspired by his parents' religious songbooks, Hymns finds Kele Okereke musing on con-

cepts of devotion and communion, while Russell Lissack has found the pedal that makes his guitar sound like an organ. The result is an un-

**KEY TRACKS:** "Only He Can Heal Me", "My True Name"

moored set of eccentric reflections on loss, life and love, painfully free of the dynamic interplay that gave Bloc Party spark.



Opener "The Love Within" barely rises above its plain electronic riff; there's some confidence in the celestial swells and urgent drums of "Different Drugs" and "My True Name", or the weird electro of "Virtue", but each peters out. The peppy "Into the Earth", Okereke singing "rock & roll has got so old/just give me neo-soul", and "The Good News", a country-esque nod to Depeche Mode, both embody this incarnation of a once fearsome band – uncomfortable.



#### **Porches**

Pool Domino

\*\*\*

New York DIY-guy delivers smart, decadent neon-pop

Pool finds Porches - aka Aaron Maine - ditching his DIY guitar ways for a run at crisp, electronic synth-pop. Which these days means "the mainstream". But created over six months in the apartment he shares with collaborator and partner Greta Kline (Frankie Cosmos), *Pool* is a compelling document worthy of Maine's obsession. His voice is a clear croon that gives heart to his cool retro creations – love-sick lines like, "In my stoner hour/oh how I float just wondering about her" ("Hour") ring true over soft pads and programming. "Mood" lifts on nervy guitar; "Underwater" is a post-dancefloor gurn. But whatever the sonic fetish, Maine's personality flickers brightest.



#### **High Highs**

Cascades Spunk

Sophomore LP from Brooklynbased Sydney act is all style

Cascades expands upon the dreamy, spectral tableau of Open Season (2013), paring back the guitars to champion Oli Chang's flawless programming ("Boxing"), expressive percussion work from Sean Hutchinson ("Movement"), and synths salvaged from the debris of so many Eighties dance precursors. Jack Milas' keening, swooping falsetto is consistently captivating. But it was no accident 2013 single "Open Season" featured in ads for Kindle and Pacífico. Like so much indie-pop, that song seemed to capture the spirit of the day while being, at root, a blank slate onto which a message - any message - might be grafted without distraction. Because High Highs have surprisingly little to say.



#### Lanu

The Double Sunrise
Pacific Theatre/Inertia ★ ★ ★
Bamboos guru turns to breezy
South Seas pop

Bamboos leader Lance Ferguson may step outside his usual funk/soul spectrum as Lanu, but it's not so different. Even with the clear influence of South Pacific exotica. this second LP is still typical Ferguson: tight, snappy and doused in retro airs. Again tapping Megan Washington as cowriter and vocalist, he evokes wistful romance amid modest genre detours. "Arrow" is an affectionate Burt Bacharach homage, while "Nightmarchers" adds a shadowy hip-hop snap. Nouvelle Vague's Melanie Pain takes lead vocals on "Ménage A Trois", and a few sumptuous instrumentals complete the package. It's all warmly nostalgic and expertly assembled, but a bit too neat to quicken the pulse.



#### **Sunflower Bean**

Human Ceremony Inertia

★★★½

Promising Nineties-influenced rock from Brooklyn three-piece

Within this (very) youthful trio, there exists a special double-act that makes this debut a compelling proposition. Firstly, there is the absorbing guitar of Nick Kivlen, who at times evokes Johnny Marr, Graham Coxon and Jack White. This colourful (and technically excellent) instrumental template, at its dreamiest on "I Was Home", is complemented by Julia Cumming's unaffected, punkinflected vocals - hers is among the most sincere and straightforwardly charming female voices of recent times. This fine combination suggests a host of Britpop acts, from Echobelly to Elastica, with dashes of shoegaze and garage-rock adding a muscularity that befits Sunflower Bean's obvious, and warranted, confidence.



#### **Fat White Family**

Songs For Our Mothers
Without Consent \*\*\*

Hell-raisers deliver dirgey psychedelia on second album

Fat White Family are the ideal band for the UK right now; their music taps into an anarchic mixture of everything that has come before, all collapsed into a squirming heap of bored anger. "Tinfoil Deathstar" and "Hits Hits Hits" are eye-curdling electronic-subverting monsters that evolve into persistent, inescapable jams. "Love Is the Crack" is a mind-numbing, slow-motion fall down a rabbit hole designed by Syd Barrett, and the swaggering Sean Lennon co-produced "Satisfied" is the kind of song Kasabian's debut could've provided had they just started digging Seventeen Seconds-era Cure. FWF might not be the band the UK wanted, but right now, they're the band the UK need. JAYMZ CLEMENTS





## A New American Classic

#### Think you know what a great biopic should be? Think different By Peter Travers

#### **Steve Jobs**

Michael Fassbender, Kate Winslet, Seth Rogen Directed by Danny Boyle

\*\*\*\*

IF YOU'RE GOING TO INTERpret on film the searching mind of an indisputable genius, it helps not to make too many dumbass moves. On that basis, score a triumph for Steve Jobs, written, directed and acted to perfection, and so fresh and startling in conception and execution that it leaves you awed. Michael Fassbender rips through the role of the volcanic Apple co-founder and CEO who sucked at personal interaction but soared at transmogrifying personal computing and everything digital from music, animation (Pixar) and publishing to those iPhones we wear like a second skin. Fassbender's Jobs is a tornado of roaring ferocity and repressed feeling. He's also charming and seductively funny, which makes him dangerous if you get too close. Fassbender gives a towering performance of savage wit and limitless firepower.

The script, by Aaron Sorkin, is sheer brilliance. Sorkin didn't so much follow Walter Isaacson's bestselling Jobs biography as absorb it into his DNA and release it with a daring structure and point of view all his own. Sorkin divides the movie into three time frames, each filmed in different formats by the gifted cinematographer Alwin Küchler and each involving the launch of a new Jobs product.

The first part, shot on lowres 16mm film, is set in 1984 in Cupertino, California, where Jobs, 29, debuts the Macintosh. The second part, presented on widescreen 35mm, unfurls at the sleek San Francisco Opera House in 1988 when Jobs, axed by Apple, presents his NeXT cube to mass indifference. The final part, utilising high-def digital, takes place in 1998 at San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall, where Jobs, back calling the shots at Apple, gives the iMac its famed send-off. Dazed by the tech-speak and whirling innovations? Sorkin offers no sympathy. Echoing Jobs' rush to the next big thing, Sorkin counts on you to keep up. It's a challenge worth taking.

Cheers to master filmmaker Danny Boyle (*Slumdog Millionaire*, *Trainspotting*) for directing Sorkin's three-act play with the hurtling speed of a white-knuckle thriller. Boyle also knows how to fill the spaces between words so they reveal the emotions of the multitudes

who come and go in Jobs' hectic life. Sorkin moves characters around his cinematic chessboard (shades of *Birdman*) with little regard to whether they were actually present during Jobs' backstage rampages. Still, their actions and reactions have the ring of harsh, abstract truth.

The actors could not be better, as they thrust and parry over 14 years with the man who compares himself to Julius Caesar, an emperor surrounded by enemies. A superb Seth Rogen finds the bruised heart in Steve "Woz" Wozniak, the Apple co-founder who can't laugh off Jobs' refusal to credit his team with the success of the Apple II computer. Michael Stuhlbarg shows us the pain in software developer Andy Hertzfeld, who suffers the wrath of Jobs for failing to make the Mac prototype say "hello". And Jeff Daniels nails every nuance as John Sculley, the Apple CEO who fires Jobs and sparks his cruel revenge.

Can anyone tame this perfectionist beast? Polish-born marketing chief Joanna Hoffman comes close. As played by the glorious Kate Winslet, Hoffman is the one person ready to give shit to the boss. She berates Moneybags for letting his former lover Chrisann Brennan (Katherine Waterston) live on welfare and for denying paternity of their five-yearold daughter, Lisa (Makenzie Moss). Nine-year-old Lisa (Ripley Sobo) gets closer to the old man. But it's not until 19-yearold Lisa (a stellar Perla Haney-Jardine) fights her controlling, withholding dad on his terms that Jobs takes his first real steps toward her.

Sorkin never goes soft on his protagonist, an adopted child with an ugly streak built to keep those closest to him at a distance. But Fassbender lets us see flickers of humanity. What

we don't see is the older, even richer Jobs who married Laurene Powell, had three children, created more Apple miracles, fought pancreatic cancer and died in 2011 at age 56.

Steve Jobs the movie aims to catch the man at three public points when people who defined their lives in relation to his showed up

at the last minute to give him holy hell. Harsh? Yes. But essential to a film about a pioneer who created products with a slick, spotless veneer to hide all the tangled circuits inside. In *Steve Jobs*, sure to rank with the year's very best films, we see the circuits without ever diminishing the renegade whose vision is still changing our digital lives.

#### **Anomalisa**

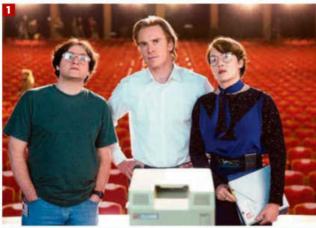
Jennifer Jason Leigh
Directed by Charlie Kaufman

\*\*\*\*

NEED PROOF THAT ANIMAtion can beat live-action filmmaking at its own game? Try Anomalisa, a love story that's as unique as it is unforgettable. Leave it to Charlie Kaufman to follow up his audacious 2008 directorial debut, Synecdoche, New York, with another groundbreaker. *Anomalisa* burrows deep into the mysteries of human nature by using stop-motion puppets with faces that look like masks. Kaufman and co-director Duke Johnson work wonders – what's miraculously inventive here is the way these puppets remind us of ourselves.

A motivational speaker, Michael Stone (voiced by David Thewlis), spends the night at

nection is real. Leigh's voice performance is truly a work of art. And when she sings for Michael – a slowed-down, seriously heartbreaking take on Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" – he's a goner. You will be, too. Michael briefly believes the anomaly that is Lisa will be his salvation. Not in Kaufman country, it won't. And yet *Anomalisa* gets under your skin. Filtered through





(1) Michael
Stuhlbarg, Michael
Fassbender and
Kate Winslet in
Steve Jobs. (2) A
one-nighter for
Thewlis and Leigh
in Anomalisa.
(3) Ronan finds
love with Cohen in
a new world in
Brooklyn.

an Ohio hotel where he will give a speech the next day. In his room, Michael visibly sags. His marriage is shit, as we hear from a phone call home. To Michael, every voice sounds the same. Hell, it literally is the same, since the invaluable Tom Noonan

speaks for every character that Michael encounters on his trip.

That is, until he meets Lisa (Jennifer Jason Leigh), an exuberant sales rep whose voice cuts through the sameness. When Michael invites Lisa back to his room, she shares her own hard-luck stories, of loves lost and opportunities missed. Michael relates to her loneliness, but admires her resilience, something he lacks. The sex is perfunctory – Lisa has body issues – but their con-



Kaufman's searching mind and soulful brilliance, the result is a masterpiece.

#### Brooklyn

 ${\it Saoirse\,Ronan}$ 

Directed by John Crowley

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THERE WILL BE BIGGER, wilder, weightier movies this year, but none lovelier than *Brooklyn*. The astonishing Saoirse Ronan (*Atonement*, *Hanna*) lights up the screen in a

performance that takes a piece of your heart. Set in 1952, the film examines the immigrant experience through the eyes of Eilis Lacey (Ronan), a shy girl whose life in economically strapped Ireland is squeezing her options. She can either be a burden at home to her mother and sister or get on that boat to New York and try to eke out a living in a strange land.

Skilfully and movingly directed by John Crowley (*Boy A*), the movie makes Eilis' loneliness palpable as she moves into a boardinghouse run with a firm hand by Ma Kehoe (a feisty, first-rate Julie Walters). But with the help of a priest (Jim Broadbent) and an empathetic floor manager (Jessica Paré) at the department store where she works, the homesick Eilis begins to emerge from her shell.

Love, of course, is a prime factor. At a local dance, Eilis meets Tony (Emory Cohen), an Italian plumber with a brash yen for this fair colleen. Cohen electrifies the movie and Eilis. He's dynamite, transforming a stock role into something wonderfully fresh and exciting. Eilis is shy and virginal but no pushover, and Ronan plays her with robust resilience. This culture-clash romance gives the film an erotic charge that explains why Eilis seriously thinks about putting down roots on alien turf.

For a time, at least. Called back to Ireland for a family crisis, the newly independent Eilis takes measure of what she's lost. Now she can find a job, care for her mother and build a connection with Jim Farrell (a splendid Domhnall Gleeson), the laddie she once rejected as a clubbish snob.

Can Eilis really go home again? Can any of us? That's the question that courses through this probing, passionate film. Is home where the heart is, or is it vice versa? In a grown-up world, love gets complicated with responsibility. The transporting script that Nick Hornby has carved out of Colm Tóibín's bestseller is a model of screen adaptation. And the actors fill the space between words with humour and aching tenderness. Brooklyn is easily the year's best and most beguiling love story. The surprise is that it also goes deeper, sadder and truer.



## Matt Damon's Space Odyssey

### Ridley Scott's sci-fi thriller delivers a real world message

**Bv Michael Adams** 

#### The Martian

Matt Damon, Jessica Chastain

Directed by Ridley Scott

\*\*\*\*1/2



While it's set on the red planet, Ridley Scott's real concern is our small blue world. If stranded astronaut Mark Watney can find a way to survive on Mars, argues this big-hearted sci-fi epic,

then the rest of us should be able to "science the shit" out of any climate crisis, if we're just brave, optimistic, smart and cooperative enough to try.

But there's no tub-thumping in *The Martian*, with that environmental message smuggled beneath the surface of what is a thrilling sci-fi blockbuster. Matt Damon is the NASA botanist left for dead by his NASA crewmates after havoc is wrought on their Mars mission by a sudden dust storm. Wounded, alone and with no-one looking for him, our man has to make this



hostile landscape habitable and try to contact Earth for a rescue. Never before has the struggle to grow potatoes, count calories and reconfigure old tech been so heart pounding.

Damon plays to his every strength and he's given stirring support by Jessica Chastain, Kristen Wiig, Jeff Daniels and Chiwetel Ejiofor, among A-listers working wonders with a script that often hits math, physics, government bureaucracy and public relations for drama.

Exciting, stirring, gorgeous and very funny, *The Martian* is Ridley Scott's light and bright antidote to the deep and dark space cynicism of his *Alien*. So much so that it could easily have been called 'The Human'.



#### **Irrational Man**

Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone

Directed by Woody Allen

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Woody Allen returns to wellworn material in this story of an angst-ridden philosophy professor who reluctantly woos a sexy, smart and sensitive student - sigh - half his age while - sigh - enthusiastically planning a Hitchcockian perfect crime for moral purposes. Joaquin Phoenix and Emma Stone are fun despite a script keener on situational ethics than insight, suspense or humour. It's passably entertaining but a pale imitation of Allen's better films, such as Crimes And Misdemeanors. He also gives Parker Posey an underwritten role now that's a real crime.



#### **Cut Snake**

 $Sullivan\, Stapleton$ 

Directed by Tony Ayres

\*\*\*

The title's idiomatic meaning and wounded phallic imagery sharply represents the way this Aussie thriller explores mad male violence in a homoerotic context. Young fella Merv is trying to shake off his prison past with naïve fiancé Paula, only for his former cellmate James to show up. Sullivan Stapleton is disturbingly great as the complex hard nut, with Alex Russell and Jessica De Gouw coming alive as their characters' desperation escalates. Tony Ayres wrings maximum menace from Blake Ayshford's tight script and satisfies with a showdown that subverts an old Warner Bros. gangster staple.



#### **Bone Tomahawk**

 $Kurt\,Russell, Patrick\ Wilson$ 

Directed by S. Craig Zahler

\*\*\*1/2

Toe-curling first and third acts offset a slow middle section in this Western horror that's like the mutant offspring of Deadwood and The Hills Have Eyes. Kurt Russell, Patrick Wilson, Richard Jenkins and Matthew Fox are tops as the quartet of 1890s cowboys who ride out to rescue Wilson's wife after she's taken captive by bloodthirsty cave dwellers. The dialogue is rich, the landscape dry and the violence red in tooth and claw. It's a good film that could've been great with a few trims for more sustained narrative tension. Special mention - the sound design. Thwock!



#### **Black Mass**

 $Johnny\,Depp$ 

Directed by Scott Cooper

\*\*\*

Despite its accuracy, Johnny Depp's make-up makes him look like Scott Tracy from Thunderbirds, which isn't a thought you need while watching this serious-as-a-fackingheart-attack true story of gangster James 'Whitey' Bulger, whose Faustian pact with the FBI let him rule Boston for two decades. Depp delivers a compelling performance, though the screen is stolen by supports Joel Edgerton, Rory Cochrane and Peter Sarsgaard. Such a familiar rise-and-fall crim-kingpin tale demands visual and narrative flair, but while director Cooper delivers solid storytelling, he's no Scorsese.

#### **LEONARDO DICAPRIO**

[Cont. from 63] is just gonna be misunderstood."

One thing is clear: He's not going to retire and chain himself to the gate of a BP plant. There has to be a strategy.

"I had a friend say, 'Well, if you're really this passionate about environmentalism, quit acting'," he says. "But you soon realise that one hand shakes the other, and being an artist gives you a platform." He pauses and offers his palms upward. "Not that necessarily people will take anything that I say seriously, but it gives you a voice."

NE AFTERNOON, DI-Caprio is heading in the Tesla to another appointment, and he wants to make something very clear.

"This is not my life," says Di-Caprio, dressed in the same outfit as the day before to maintain continuity in the shooting. He stares intently at me. "I'm not followed around by publicists, security guards, drivers and all that. That's not my day-to-day life – it's my professional life."

Talk moves to what he loves to do most: scuba dive in exotic locations. He's hit Australia, the Galapagos and multiple spots in the Caribbean. Even relying on the oxygen kindness of Edward Norton to survive hasn't dampened his love.

"It's a hypnotic, unbelievably beautiful ecosystem that's below the surface of the world we live in," says DiCaprio, his face relaxing noticeably. "It's a complete escape from absolutely everything."

Today is an escape of a different sort. DiCaprio is standing on a catwalk outside a giant glass tank simulating a hurricane at the University of Miami. As the waters pound a model house on a model beach, he makes a joke: "I spent a lot of time in a tank like this for *Titanic*." For 45 minutes, a scientist tells DiCaprio about the shredding Florida will take during the next hurricane. DiCaprio hits the vape pipe during a pause and exchanges a

look with Stevens that suggests, "You try to put a happy ending on this."

DiCaprio says goodbye to the crew and says he'll see them in Paris for the climatechange conference. He knows that one of the first things conservatives will throw at him is the amount of fuel used by the thousands of attendees.

"There's no way we're not all hypocrites," says DiCaprio. "We've built this. Our entire society is oil-based. Everything that you see is because of fossil fuels. The day there is a sustainable way to travel, I'll be first in line."

For DiCaprio, the trip was worth it. After the Paris Agreement was signed, he declared, "[This] gives us a shot at saving the planet. There is no time to waste. This marks the end of the fossil-fuel era."

But that's a week away. For now, he has a few hours of downtime with his art-gallery friends. On the way downtown, I mention that his intensity on global warming is, well, intense. "You noticed that, huh?" he says. "This has got to be the largest human movement in history, and it takes every religion, every country, every individual contributing to it."

We arrive at a ritzy gallery that shows no sign of the coming apocalypse. Security guards swarm the car. I begin to say goodbye, but DiCaprio puts his hand on my arm. "Don't worry, I'm not jumping out of the car." He continues on for a couple more minutes about a new ally in the fight. "We finally have a pope for the first time that is speaking through his encyclical and has aligned himself with modern science."

Someone knocks on the window. It's time to go. Di-Caprio opens the door, and the likely next winner of the Oscar for Best Actor is immediately engulfed in handlers. He turns back and shouts over his shoulder with a smile, "Nice talking to you, bro!"

For just a moment, Leonardo DiCaprio looks like a kid without a care in the world.



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## **Brendon Urie**

The Panic! At the Disco frontman on chicken hearts, smoking weed and 'Bad Blood' By Jonny Nail

#### The last record I bought

Last week I bought Whitechapel's *Our Endless War*. I've been going back to my metal and hardcore roots just a little bit lately.

#### The last book I read

I just started Elvis Costello's autobiography, which is really cool. I didn't know most of that history. I like more and more [of his songs] as I get older. I now worship his discography – all of it. So much of it is just so weird and different. He's just such a unique artist.

#### The last song I couldn't get out of my head

Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood". That thing has been in my head for four months [laughs]. I wake up with that shit, go to bed with that shit.

#### The last time I was embarrassed

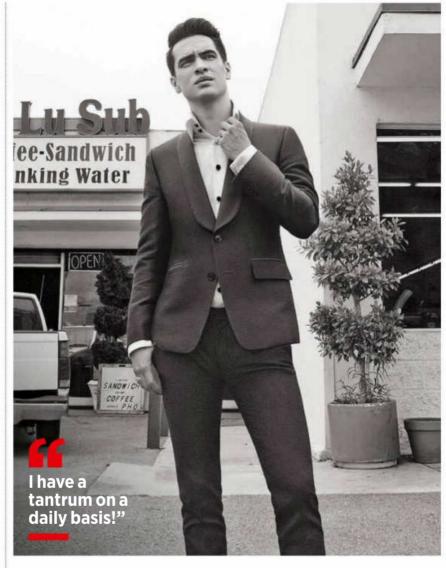
Last night. I was telling a story about a band I had listened to early on, like I knew what the hell I was saying. I talked for about 20 minutes and then at the end everyone was like, "You know that's not the name of the band, right?" I just went bright red and was like, "Yeah, I know, I was just seeing if you guys did." [Laughs] The last fight I had

I haven't been in a physical fight for a while. The last time I was in an actual real fight was in high school, like 12 years ago. I stepped in for a friend, just because it was five guys on one and I felt obligated 'cause he was my ride [laughs] – and my friend. I punched a bunch of guys in the back of the head, grabbed my backpack, jumped in his truck and we took off. It was a quick fight! I don't even know if people knew I was there!

#### The last time I broke the law

I honestly think it happens quite a bit. In California, weed has been decriminalised, but it's not decriminalised everywhere, and we play so many shows that sometimes when you show up to a venue they'll have some medicine and you'll partake, but it's not necessarily legal in that state. That happens, but that's like the most [illegal thing]. I don't go out of my way lobe a shitty citizen.

The last time I ate something I regretted



We were in South America, and we were at a legit local Brazilian steakhouse and it was amazing. They were just carving meat on your plate – really good quality stuff. Then they bring over this bowl,

and it looks like little lima beans. I was like, "What is this?" And they were like, "Chicken hearts." Of course I had to try it. The flavour was like chicken, but the texture was like a rubber band. It kinda freaked me out.

#### The last time I threw a tan-

That happens on a daily basis! During a show, if something bad is happening I'm like, "What the fuck is going wrong, why can't we figure this out?" I'll lose it and then compose myself

and have to go around and apologise to everyone: "Sorry I lost my shit, but I feel I'd like to change this."

#### The last time I got starstruck

It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia is one of my favourite all-time shows. I love it. I was in a bar one time in Venice with a bunch of friends and Glenn Howerton, the guy that plays Dennis Reynolds [walked in]. I turned around and just yelled his name. I was kinda drunk. I shook his hand and said, "I'm sorry for that, I know how weird that gets. I just want to tell you that I'm a huge fan of your show and I really need to tell you how much I appreciate your writing." And then he was really cool and asked, "What do you do?" And I was like, "I'm in a band." We talked a bit, and he asked which album he should buy. And I told him to buy *Too Weird to Live*. And he bought it right there in front of me! That was the coolest thing. I was so stoked!

#### Death of a Bachelor

Panic! At the Disco released their fifth studio album, featuring the single "Victorious", last month.

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